Marxism Today

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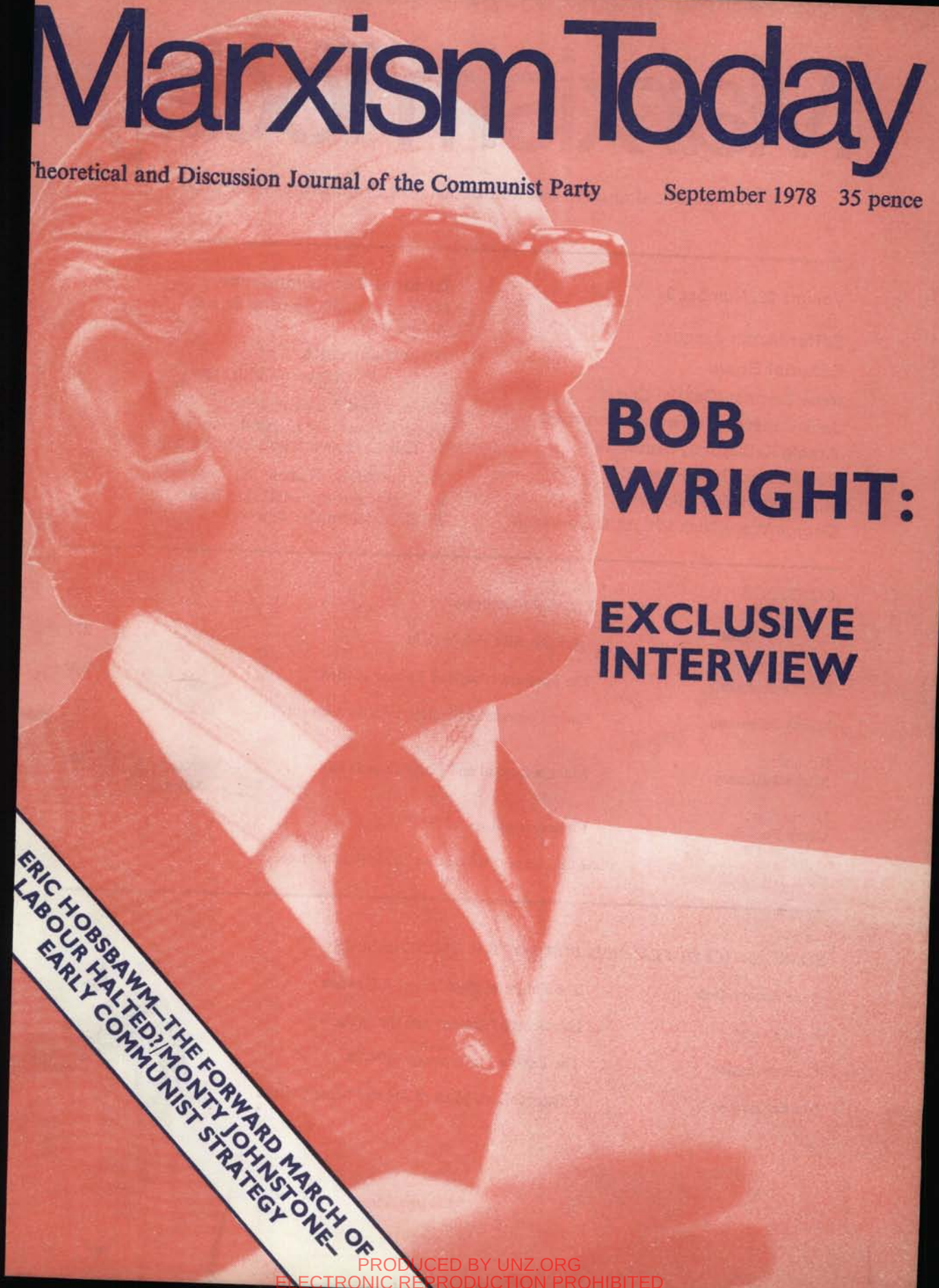

BOB WRIGHT:

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

ERIC HOBSBAWM—THE FORWARD MARCH OF LABOUR HALTED?/MONTY JOHNSTONE—EARLY COMMUNIST STRATEGY

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Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

Volume 22, Number 9

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Editorial Comments

Over the last few months we have held a series of discussions on perspectives for *Marxism Today*. These discussions have by no means been completed: but we are anxious to involve a wider number of people in these exchanges. The purpose of these brief editorial comments is to set out our thinking on *Marxism Today*, as a basis for wider discussion.

ROLE OF "MARXISM TODAY"

The key function of the journal must be to promote and enrich the political outlook and activity of the Communist Party and, more widely, the left. This means forging a much closer relationship between our theoretical work and our practical activities.

This is not an easy task. Despite past achievements, it is clear that—for all kinds of reasons—the relationship between theory and practice, both within the Communist Party and the left, leaves a lot to be desired. We need to try and overcome this gap, this divide.

Recent developments have created new possibilities for this. The renewal of marxism in the last few years—which James Klugmann pointed to in his Editorial Comments exactly a year ago—has vital political implications. We are now, for example, much better able to come to terms with the nature of advanced capitalist democracies. Nonetheless, much of this renewal—especially in Britain—has remained at a relatively abstract level. The priority now must be to bring these developments into a closer relationship with our political work. To achieve such a change requires, not least, a much closer relationship between our intellectuals and those involved in the labour movement.

PERSPECTIVES

To help enrich our political outlook, *Marxism Today* must tackle a very wide range of problems and issues: cultural and social questions, international developments, trends in the communist movement, developments and discussions in marxist theory. Each of these areas—and many others—bears directly upon our political view and work. But we need to try and ensure that this diversity doesn't mean a series of compartments, a hotch-potch catering for different "publics". This remains a real problem. We need to try and generate a clearer view of the links between these areas and also, therefore, a stronger unity in and of the journal itself.

Notwithstanding this diversity, though, the journal must have priorities. Following from the points outlined above, at the core of the journal, most months, must be articles which analyse political developments in Britain—both from topical and strategic standpoints. Thus, it must deal with such questions as racialism, the character of the Labour Government, industrial democracy, the Conservative Party, the women's movement, and such strategic issues as the state (and its various aspects), the broad democratic alliance, class, the nature of socialism and economic strategy.

With the recent discussion on *The British Road to Socialism*, we have begun to get a flow of articles on strategic questions which bodes well for the future. Articles of more immediate, wide-ranging and topical *analysis*, however, are still too few and far between. Yet they are critical to the project we have set ourselves: a closer relationship between our theoretical and political work.

To achieve such a core of articles means, amongst other things, that we need to develop a wider range of writers—intellectuals, party cadres, activists in the trade union and democratic movements, etc. We also—for some questions—need to consider different forms of articles. The interview is an example. We also need to emphasise more collective forms of writing. We rarely get joint articles—for example, by trade union activists and intellectuals. Yet, for some questions, this would be a stimulating and appropriate method of writing. Collective forms of writing, moreover, would help to overcome one of the most common criticisms of the journal, namely, the diversity of the style and language in its articles, areas of relative incomprehensibility, etc.

READERSHIP

The kind of approach we are outlining here entails, fairly obviously, aiming at a more diverse readership. A Communist theoretical

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journal is not simply for those in and from higher education. That—for *Marxism Today*—would be a very elitist view. It is not an academic journal, a house journal of professional intellectuals. Rather, it must appeal to and be read by academics, industrial workers, branch activists, trade union cadres and students, to name but some. If we are serious about generating a closer relationship between our theoretical and political work, about promoting a richer "political culture", then this is essential. It is also what can and to some extent already does make *Marxism Today* relatively unique and special as a theoretical journal.

This brings us to the problem of how *Marxism Today* is actually read and used. The approach outlined here means that the journal should assume an increasingly "interventionist" role. In this context, we have heard from a number of areas that they are establishing—or are considering establishing—*Marxism Today* readers' groups. We know that there are many party branches that already use articles in the journal as a basis for discussion and education. Such developments—and we are anxious to hear about them—could enable the journal to enjoy a more "living" relationship with the party and with our readers—both party and non-party.

It must be emphasised here, that the journal should not be seen simply as an "internal" journal—a journal produced by the Communist Party for the Communist Party. Rather, it must appeal to the party *and* to the wider left. It must contain articles by party and non-party writers—indeed, we need significantly more of the latter. It should be available at party and non-party outlets—at left bookshops, stalls at progressive events and so on. It should be sold publicly—as it is now to a limited extent—by party branches and members.

DESIGN OF THE JOURNAL

The central problem of the journal is obviously what it contains. But there is a close and important relationship between what a journal contains and what it looks like. How "theory" is presented will determine—at least to some extent—how it is seen, its image, who reads it, how and why. In this context we have begun to discuss a possible redesign of the journal—including the use of graphics—which would help to make its content more accessible and available.

AGENTS

A journal is not just a collection of articles: it involves a whole myriad of relationships. For the journal to reach out to wider sections, it must involve many more people in numerous different ways. It needs, in short, to be a more open and collective enterprise. Apart from the Board, we now have a number of people working together as editorial staff on different aspects of the journal—promotion, circulation, advertising, design, editing, etc. We need to involve, as already suggested, many more people in writing. We need more comments—more feedback on what is in the journal. We need more suggestions about what should be in it; what is wrong with it, and how it can be improved. We need more people to promote and sell the journal.

In this context, we are anxious to foster, in the main cities and centres, a team of agents who can help promote and sell the journal; who can help provide criticisms, comments and suggestions. A journal needs roots, and such a team could begin to help do this. We would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to help in this respect.

DISCUSSION

The approaches outlined here are only guidelines. We are anxious to involve much larger numbers of people in discussing the future development of the journal—its content, its readership, its language, its design, its relationship to other party journals.

For this purpose, we will be organising a series of discussions on perspectives for the journal later this year, which will be advertised in a future issue of the journal. These, hopefully, will provide us with an opportunity to discuss the development of the journal on a much more collective basis.

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Interview with Bob Wright

(The interview was conducted for Marxism Today *by PETE COUGHLIN, North-West District Secretary of the Communist Party, formerly a member of the Exective Committee of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (Technical and Supervisory Section) and DAVE WYNN, a member of the Editorial Board of* Marxism Today, *formerly a research worker for the AUEW (Engineering Section).*

BOB WRIGHT is currently Assistant General Secretary of the AUEW and was for eight years, until 1976, the Executive Council Member for the Division which covers the Greater Manchester area and the Midlands. Over the last ten years he has been widely seen as the principal standard bearer of the Left in the engineering union. As such he has contested the two key positions in the AUEW of General Secretary and President, but lost both on the second ballot.)

Bob, could you tell us something about your trade union and political background?

I became involved in the trade union and labour movement at the age of 16 when we had the national apprentice strike in 1937, and followed through from there as a trade union apprentice leader in the Manchester area and later in the national apprentice movement, which was very important at that time. During the war years I was active as a shop steward, and in the broader movement around the Manchester area, and we began to build a positive broad left movement in the early period following the last war.

I joined the Labour Party in 1944 and have been an individual member ever since. I recall very vividly the campaign for Victory for Socialism in the early fifties, a period of substantial trauma in the Labour Party when they were expelling and withdrawing the whip from left-wingers like Aneurin Bevan, Michael Foot and many others. We began to generate the movement inside the union for democracy and left wing policies in the early fifties, and out of that grew the journal *Engineering Voice* which became very much an instrument of the national broad left inside the AEU, as it was then.

In the same period I served on the union's District Committee in Stockport and we saw the growth of the broad left movement in Manchester. Hugh Scanlon won the Divisional Organiser's office in 1947, later Tom Shaw in Ashton-under-Lyne, and in 1957, ten years later, I became the Stockport District Secretary having served as District President and committee man for a number of years. We had gathered a very forceful team of shop stewards and convenors in the area, and it was a period of tremendous importance because it really set the pattern of a broad left national movement within the union. In spite of attempts by the then Executive to denigrate the activities of the broad left and *Engineering Voice*, we made considerable advances in many of the industrial areas of the country on the basis of the broad left unity movement.

You use the term "broad left", Bob, what do you mean by that?

Well, there are various interpretations. The view that we expressed within the union was that we were seeking to bring together, in a positive activity sense, on policy, elections and other union issues all those who were basically on the left of centre in the Labour Party or indeed held a mixture of opinions —some of them were not aligned with any political party as such but were generally progressive in their outlook.

Tolerance had to be shown on some of the delicate political issues because, of course, there are substantial differences within the left. From time to time that has caused strains and in some areas there's been a little bit of tightness about trusting people because their credentials are not perfect. But our endeavours have been directed towards the defeat of reaction in the trade union movement, and to do that we were firmly convinced that we had to bring together all the elements of progressive trade union and political thinking under that title of broad left.

Why do you think the left has suffered setbacks, such as your defeats for General Secretary and President, in recent years? What are the lessons for us?

I think we should recognise that, when you say setbacks, the right wing and reactionary elements in the union have themselves become much better organised in the campaigning process than they were, and perhaps that's a by-product of the movement that actually became a threat to their power and ascendancy.

Probably the weakness that has emerged on our

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side has been that in recent years sectarianism in left politics has become divisive, disrupting the pattern of unity that we founded the broad left movement on. I don't think we've either really conquered the puritanical thinking that emerges from time to time on what we mean by left unity, and what its objectives are. It is not on for some of our people to adopt the attitude that when we gain advances we can then begin to be more selective about who our friends are, thus creating conditions that ultimately weaken the broad left movement. That has happened in some areas.

Are you saying that there hasn't been enough effort made to extend the base of the movement?

That's right. What we've got to recognise is the trade union concept that we have unity on basic questions such as policy issues on wages strategy, on organisation and democracy, and on amalgamation, coupled with the kind of people that we can support and unite behind, not only for major offices in the union, but for rank and file representation at the National Committee, rank and file representation at the Labour Party Conference and TUC, and every other delegation in the locality, membership of District Committees and leadership in the factories, and so on. It's conceiving that kind of unity that is extremely delicate. Because if we then in some situations get particular lines emerging from one political wing or another, and insistence that we either go all the way or have nothing, then we shall see divisions develop. Of course you have to debate these issues out, not compromise, but decide on what basis we can succeed and carry with us the maximum unity behind commonly agreed policies. It's far more important that we do that than remain loyal to idealism that we're not likely to achieve.

As part of the upsurge in left activity and the development of the broad left, new leaders were elected to office—Hugh Scanlon and others—and there is currently a tendency to personalise some of the problems around these people. What do you think should be the relationship between the leaders elected with broad left support and the rank and file?

Well, I think the relationship has got to be a close one. We've attempted to hold broad left regional and national delegate meetings, with national figures such as Hugh Scanlon and myself present and involved in discussions. I think what's happened, of course, is inevitable when we get a Labour Government—and we support the return of a Labour Government; it's not a question of any other alternative being available to us, but we equally fight inside the movement for progressive and socialist policies. The divisions that have developed are principally on the role of the present government and the economic policies that have been pursued, the social contract conception of control on wages and other issues that flow from that. Hugh Scanlon, of course, has differences with the majority inside the broad left on his very positive support for the social contract and related policies. My view is that we don't break the movement up or sacrifice it to individuals. But equally let me say, we're certainly proud to have been involved and worked closely with Hugh Scanlon in the fight against the Tory Industrial Relations Act, and nobody can question his tenacity and courage in that conflict. The other point I would make (and it's not often understood) is that we have never had left control on the Executive of the AUEW Engineering Section, and that obviously has compelled us to support collectively decided policies which we haven't necessarily fully agreed with. These are difficult areas because in the position of trade union leadership you are bound by policy decisions of the National Committee and the union, and therefore whilst we continue to fight for changes, the fact that we haven't had that kind of determining control has made things extremely delicate.

Are you happy that there has been enough close contact between the broad left at local level and the leadership?

One of the difficulties of involvement is that we have neither the facility nor in many cases the time for the root accountability that is necessary in order to get down to the rank and file, meet them and argue out the issues of the day, although every opportunity as far as I'm concerned has been taken to do that. Can I just add though that I think contact can and must be improved. I think we've got to restructure the whole nature of the broad left movement because we are missing out in many areas of communication. My experience has taught me that being elected to office isolates you in many ways, and pressures begin to take over from your close relationship with the grassroots. I think it's a truth that there is a drift away from understanding the basic grassroot aspirations of the workers—and that becomes dangerous.

What is your response to the criticism that the broad left in the AUEW has been too much of an

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election machine, with insufficient discussion of policy and campaigning issues?

Yes, that's partly true but it's understandable in a union like ours where we face a continuous process of elections. That becomes a very engaging challenge and one on which we're bound to spend a lot of time on in generating support for individuals committed to broad left policies. I don't apologise for the fact that elections are so important, because they are absolutely part of the fulfilment of policy. Elections, therefore, are part of policy, but I do think there are certain weaknesses in not clearly relating the two, and this obviously is something that we've got to improve upon.

There's nothing that we decide on industrial or electoral questions that isn't political. In the recent elections in our union, including the Presidential election, the press understood what it was all about and, because of the system that's now operating (the postal ballot) they very clearly took advantage of their power to influence members with misleading statements that were widely reported.

Elections have been a spur to the engineering broad left. There's no doubt at all about that because we have constant elections at every level in our union and re-elections for every officer, we have a constant process of pressure and broad left organisation around that. And that's why there is this concentration on the electoral process.

The left resisted the introduction of postal balloting in the AUEW and the right appears to have gained from it. What is your view?

Whether it is in the present form or some amended form, I think the fact that the postal ballot is in operation will lead to two things. First of all, an extremely virile intervention in the internal affairs of the union by the press and by other external organisations. But the biggest danger is that it will be seen as a substitute for real democracy in the union. Putting a cross on a piece of paper once every five years is not in itself democracy. The ability to have accountability, and for those you've elected to be brought to account within the union, is a continuing process. The influence of the rank and file on the process of decision-making is far more important to democracy than that cross on a piece of paper.

The second thing is that having instituted a postal ballot system I get worried about the fact that it is an over-centralised system. I would far sooner see it being returned to the branches, and with members having the option of registering for a postal ballot or attending the branch to vote. We must remember that whatever we argue about the virtues of the postal ballot, for a lot of reasons there are some 260,000 members who are not registered and don't receive a vote. This means there are still about 70 per cent of those registered, or 75 per cent of the total membership who don't vote in the major national elections. We certainly haven't solved the problem of total involvement.

I think that there needs to be a system which enables all those who want to be involved in the debate about elections and to vote at branch meetings to do so and those who wish to register for the postal vote also to be able to do so. But I want to see it controlled and returned to the rank and file at branch level because I think the external influences now are extremely dangerous, and the mechanism raises a lot of doubts about its integrity.

More generally, what do you see as the role and function of the branches now, in 1978?

First of all, the branch is the base of the rank and file membership. The only other base is the factory. I don't think in the average factory there are meetings of members discussing the internal affairs of the union and policy strategies and all those issues. I think what's happened in the course of the recent period is that we've seen a dip in the need of the member to go to the branch, and we responded badly to that dip. Now, instead of looking for ways of redeveloping, reorganising branch involvement, we may have to increase the size of the branch, take away from the secretary of the branch some of the mundane tasks he has to carry out. We may have to think, instead of the branch meeting every fortnight, of meeting bi-monthly, or monthly, or perhaps quarterly, with special meetings to discuss policy strategies and so on, with the normal meeting of the branch being handled by the branch committee and the officers, at which members can pay their contributions. I would think that with something like a six-weekly cycle of full membership meetings together with a special quarterly involvement—and ballots held on those quarter nights—you're talking about the germination of a much deeper involvement of the rank and file members. I think it's very important that we look for the means of generating membership involvement, and the branch was always in my view the cornerstone of the democracy of the union.

Bob, since the war the engineering industry has been changing very fast indeed, in fact industry in general. Do you think that the left has discussed

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the implications of that change enough and tried to work out policies that help the members to deal with that change?

I think that we've appreciated the challenges of changing technology and industry. Very substantial disruptions in large sectors of the heavy and medium engineering industry, shipbuilding and machine tools—and elsewhere—have taken place, and we, of course, have broadly fought on the basis of retention of our industries and their development. I think perhaps the greatest weakness is that we haven't drawn together and related the implications of industrial change and the magnitude of the challenges of technological development sufficiently in advance to meet those issues when we have faced them. We tend to rely on the old principles of the right to work, opposition to redundancies, which are correct. But if you're going to succeed in that direction you've got to have a positive plan. The Lucas aerospace shop stewards have pioneered a concept that's extremely valuable and so have the stewards in other sections of industry who have emulated that. I think the national unions and the left as a whole haven't really drawn the political implications of what we're now facing, because, notwithstanding the present economic troubles of the Western capitalist countries and the unemployment consequent on that together with the economic restraints that we've experienced in Britain, with a similar pattern in other countries, much of the development of unemployment is the result of technological advance and the changing nature of industry. And therefore we've got to relate claims on the reduction in hours, claims on positive alternative policies and redistribution of wealth to those developments, and be prepared to advance proposals to meet that challenge and to convince our membership that you can't just sit back and let it happen. I think this is one of the great weaknesses in the trade union movement. We tend to respond to issues as they occur. We don't have a creative, probing policy that begins to draw together the development of the challenges and the need to be looking ahead. I want to see the trade union movement beginning to create strategies and policies, not just to react to other people's policies and other people's actions. Because that is defensive, and I think we've got to be a more aggressive force such that we can get our members to understand that many of the problems they face on the shopfloor are indeed problems that are created by political and economic strategies over which we have had very little or no control.

The engineering industry, specifically, has changed a good deal in the last twenty years—new technology, so-called "deskilling", the involvement of new groups of workers, and so on. How has the union, and the left, responded?

There are two types of change. One is the employer-motivated desire to reduce the class of labour in order to cheapen labour. That is something the trade unions have got to resist, because the nature of skills has changed. Of course there's been a revolution in the last 50 years. And equally, there are many jobs that are not craft jobs but are just as skilled, and that's illustrated in almost every sector of industry. So we mustn't see the change in the class of labour as a cheapening of the job—it has got to reflect higher living standards, and the protection of craft jobs is important only to the extent that it recognises the nature of training and the use of skills inside employment.

We've got a new class, a person who is a skilled worker, but not a craft worker, and they are a very important part of the union's organisation. The union has got to gear itself to the elimination of classes within its own ranks. In other words, craftsmen should not be in any privileged position. And that equally applies to what we call "staff". We've got to fight for and begin to recognise that whether classified as staff or general manual workers, people have a common bond, and there should be common advances and benefits, and that employer-imposed divisions have got to be removed.

What, then, about recent developments among the toolroom workers in the car industry?

In the motor industry, with the growth of new skills on assembly, the role of the craftsman has been under constant attack by the employer for the last thirty or forty years. And his wage lead, in comparison with the assembly worker, has diminished.

On the other side of the fence the craftsmen sees technical workers—and I'm not talking about highly sophisticated technicians—now on much higher standards than himself. So for the craftsmen there's an aggravation on both sides—their relationship with the shopfloor and their relationship with this widening band of technical workers. This has fuelled, for example, the revolt in the toolroom in Leyland's, and in many other sections of our industry, and I think there's got to be a positive dialogue. But I don't see the solution as them breaking away into a separate band because that would merely lead to defensive mechanisms being created by the production people who would say, well, if you can give those people certain

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improvements in their wage packet, then we must have the same. So you've got a clash then between groups of workers within either one union or unions who are commonly involved in that industry.

I think you've got to sit down and negotiate a union strategy. Also let me say that this has been exaggerated by wage restraint. A lot of emphasis is being placed on loss of differentials but those losses have been substantially contributed to by wage restraint in eighteen out of the last thirty years. But I think the answer is this: that instead of having diffusion into segments of influence in the belief that that will resolve it, we've got to have a much deeper, single trade union structure. I am a firm believer in the concept of an industrial union.

The concept of an industrial union—could you elaborate on that?

Well, engineering is probably one of the best organised industries, and secondly one of the most fragmented industries in terms of the number of unions that operate within it. So it's a perfect example for examining a future structure in union terms. Now the big challenge in front of us in an industry like engineering is, of course, the problem of two concepts that are developing in this country. One is the general worker union concept in which there's a multi-industry organisation, or the movement towards industrial trade unionism. I don't see it as insurmountable to talk to the general workers' unions about amalgamation for part of their organisation and still retain the embryo of a general workers' union organisation. Because amalgamation could take many forms. The idea that anybody's got to hand over their total interest into one organisation with the dominance of one group or another isn't essentially amalgamation in itself. I mean you can do it, it can be hammered out on the basis of one industrial organisation—and if I may say, take a union like ours. It's not commonly understood that there's some 200,000 of our members who don't work in engineering and shipbuilding. They work in maintenance services in many other industries. So if we're talking about industrial groupings, we're involved (not to the same degree) but in the same kind of exercise of re-subdividing those members into other industries such as chemicals, public services and many others. I think the industrial union concept is the best of all options available for our future development.

Moving on, Bob, how do you see the relationship between free collective bargaining and an alternative economic strategy?

One of the challenges that I believe is not being generated sufficiently by the broad left is that to win back free collective bargaining isn't in itself an isolated issue. It is entirely related to the whole economic strategy that's being pursued by the government and the trade unions at the present time. If we continue to accept wage restraint then we accept the economic policies that accompany it, based on the premise that capitalism is under stress and that the workers have got to make a contribution in lower living standards in order to protect that system. And the alternative strategy —including an expanding economy, control of capital and investment, priorities in the investment field, control of the hundred major companies which themselves account for a large sector of our industrial capacity, and greater state intervention through the financing of those companies with public finance and accountability—must be part of an immediate strategy that we've got to fight for on the broad left.

If we go on accommodating the present policies I believe we're going to see a very substantial growth in unemployment and a very substantial reduction in the standard of living of every worker. And that's why we've got to use the broad left movement to unite ourselves. Of course there are imperfections but I'm convinced that that kind of economic strategy inside the trade union movement is what the members are looking for, because many of them now regard the national trade union leadership as part of the establishment. They're so involved in Labour politics on a parliamentary level they forget that they're there to serve the interests of ordinary workers.

How would you account, then, for the general current weakness of the left in the face of right wing policies? For example, at last year's TUC the left won a resolution for an alternative economic strategy but in his speech the Prime Minister, Mr. Callaghan, effectively won the delegates for support for the government's present policies.

Well, this is the difference between the adoption of policy and the implementation of policy. There were, of course, a lot of people who, hand on heart, voted for the principles of an alternative economic strategy who didn't intend to carry it out.

This is a great weakness of conferences. The binding nature of policy decisions needs more rigidly monitoring. I don't think that the Trades Union Congress has done other than project those policies in a flimsy way. I don't think it's really

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fought to implement them.

The prevailing view has been that whatever happens we must not do anything to imperil the continuation of a Labour Government. That has been the very dangerous sacrificial element that has crept into trade union decision-making, and it is a false premise that if you defend the Labour Government you're sustaining it, because the problem mounts up, and if you pass policies that are then ignored, it's far worse than not passing those policies and fighting for those that you believe are right. Those who fought for the social contract won the battle—at least, in policy decision-making. I think it's fair to say that during the first two years of the social contract there was no real resistance. Even the left were prepared to at least mark time. But now, it's not just the left who are beginning to react to what's going on. It is indeed many of those previously heavily committed to the social contract concept who are now beginning to recognise that unemployment, low living standards, the continuing pressure on the working class is not resolving the problems of our economy.

Until we really get that message over we're not going to win the minds of the mass of the working people for what we call left policies.

How, in your view, has the government been able to win popular support for acceptance of the social contract and the policies of wage restraint, depressed living standards and so on which flow from it?

I think it's because, first of all, they have built up the crisis situation. I think they've built up the fear syndrome against unemployment. If you challenge these policies you'll have mass unemployment bigger than you've got now and unless you accept these sacrifices, the alternative is going to be far worse. And I think that power of propaganda has made tremendous inroads into the thinking of many working people. But the problem in the trade union context is that we also must recognise that the established machinery of the union is very divided, the leadership is very divided. We've got very substantial forces in the trade union movement who lend their support to the policies that are being carried out—I repeat, some on the left. So there is confusion.

I think the big problem of recent experience has been that the left more than the right recognises the need to have a Labour Government and to keep Labour in power. The difference between the left and the right is that when we get a Labour Government in power the right wing want to believe that that resolves the problem—the left have got to maintain the pressure for the correct policies. I think that the last three years has created a situation in which the left has been seen to be attacking the concept of a Labour Government. And there's been a very clever twist to the challenge of vigilance and accountability by transforming it into an attack. Now I know the old traditional political gibes of rocking the boat and all the other attendant strategies that have gone on over a succession of Labour Governments in the post-war period. But I think that this time there has been a much deeper challenge to basic concepts. The unfortunate part of it is that Labour is becoming more closely identified with a capitalist strategy rather than a socialist strategy. The socialist challenge is becoming a diminishing factor. And workers, as I read it, are beginning to say: "Well, what the hell's the difference?" And that's the danger, because unless we are able to reinstate the real alternative political and economic strategies aimed at the development of the socialist concept, then I think that the role of Labour as a real alternative to the Tories, which is the traditional capitalist party in this country, is a diminishing role and its credibility begins to crumble.

I think these problems can become more acute as the crisis develops, because I think if we continue the present economic strategy, and I base this not just on my own perception, I think we're going to face a very substantial increase in unemployment, not just short-term, and parallel with that a very substantial increase in cuts in what we call the Welfare State, and again parallel with that, a diminishing living standard for the majority of people in this country. And if we're not careful we will not be ready to meet that challenge, because the workers will become estranged from both. That's why I think we've got to face very seriously the challenge from the right, including the Tory right. It is significant, of course, that in this period the Tory Party's swung very much to the right. The Thatcherite leadership is much more right wing than the Heath leadership was and, indeed, the previous leadership of the Tory Party. It is very significant that this has happened, and the danger is that Labour will be persuaded to go more right itself in that process, and that the workers will begin to look to the right, and that's why we must not underestimate the danger in that kind of crisis of workers moving towards fascism. That is what happened (though it was not the sole cause) in Germany in the pre-war period out of the enormous crisis that was created.

I was going to ask about your reference to the decline of socialist consciousness and to the socialist challenge as a diminishing factor. I'd like

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you to say a bit more about that—the reasons why you think that has happened. What evidence would you put forward?

A key problem here is the lack of a united socialist left. You've had the development of a degree of fragmentation on the left as expressed in some of the ultra-leftist groups that have been very active in recent years. I think their role is diminishing because they're losing credibility. I equally think that the movement towards left unity must ultimately produce common objectives and strategies. If we can achieve that then I believe we can begin to win a much deeper involvement of the trade union membership. What I would like to see in this country is the development of left wing socialist unity. The traditional social democratic movements like the Labour Party, or, as I would prefer to put it, a democratic socialist movement, marrying common strategies with the Communist Party and other left wing forces on a British policy. I think the new strategy of the Communist Party goes a long way towards providing a movement in that direction. I think equally that, apart from political fears because of cold war divisions, there are growing elements within the Labour Party and the trade unions who would themselves be prepared to contribute towards that kind of development.

Now if we can begin to get a common strategy for positive political developments, which I think has got to be generated on democratic lines through the ballot box, that I believe is the way forward. I reject completely the argument that we can only get socialism by revolution. I think that there will be resistance, and it will be very powerful, but I believe if we can create a unity, then those common objectives will be achievable. And that's why I have supported and indeed propagated the removal of bans, proscriptions and divisions in the British labour and trade union movement.

You mention the Communist Party's new programme. What specifically do you see as the positive features of the new edition of The British Road to Socialism *which would help towards the development of left and socialist unity?*

First of all the programme is geared to an electoral platform, and presents a popular challenge based on the development of socialism within the nature of our society and recognises the political growth and background of the British labour movement, which is very different from most other countries historically and in its development. I think it recognises the powerful influence of the trade union movement. And it makes an appeal for a common platform on social services, housing policies, gearing the social needs of the country to its economy, and the recognition that we have got to break down international barriers to trade. Now all of these policies, if I may say, with no reflection on the emphasis and the degree, are inherently part of Labour's policy. Whether they've been carried out by Labour Governments is another question.

I reserve the right to and do disagree—in a constructive way—with some policies carried out in the socialist countries and I believe this is an essential socialist concept. I equally think *The British Road to Socialism*, the Party's major change in its approach on industry, the development of socialism, is a major contribution towards breaking down what has developed as a rigid division between the political objectives of the Labour Party itself and those of the Communist Party in Britain.

Yet far from getting the development of the political organisation that we need, we're facing real problems. For instance, the Labour vote has declined, Labour Party membership is smaller and Communist Party membership has also declined.

Yes, but I think if we project the right kind of strategies and approach, I think we can begin to get that involvement. First of all let me say that in the educational intelligence of the young working class in this country, the ordinary youth, there's a much greater ability to absorb knowledge, but the danger is that you get a sub-division, you get those who do that and those who are becoming almost totally cultural sponges. Now it seems to me that we must develop movements like the Anti-Nazi League—the tremendous upsurge and response that has come, as a result of the challenge there, from mainly young people. I think that in itself demonstrates we've got to develop an ability to talk that kind of language and to promote those kind of challenges. Probably we overdo it on the left; do too much and say too much instead of having our priorities. You know, who the hell wants to read a 60-page strategy document—that's only the intellectually involved membership. So we've got to get some means for getting across some of the basic strategies of the day. Talking about yesterday and a hundred years ago and all the other things—on the left, indeed, we do either tend to over-emphasise the importance of history and development or under-estimate the events of the day. And we come in at the tail end, you know, having resisted pop music suddenly find that it's a good, healthy pursuit, so we popularise it—and I don't particularise on pop

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music, but this is true of what we do on the left. We're academic about how we approach the issues and we don't talk the language of ordinary working people. We've got to get out of the idea of talking down to them and we've got to talk to them and with them. That's what I think's wrong with the left.

We're nearly at the end of this very helpful interview, Bob. Would you like to say anything about the role of the Communist Party or the struggles and development of the left in the current political scene?

Well, I think I've already commented on the two principal developments—one is of course, I think, the enormous importance of the Communist Party moving into the broad left concept. Secondly, it's adopted a basic strategy that fits the needs of socialism in Britain, recognising the development of our society and the nature of the challenge. I think perhaps as an outsider, because I never like to be critical of other people, that it's probably still true today that the Communist Party is still today a rigidly Marxist and theoretical party, wanting to draw conclusions that oversimplify the challenges of today, and looking too far ahead for people to appreciate what is the need of the hour as opposed to the need of the future. What we've got to present is popular, immediate demands which are achievable—not aiming for the moon—and I think that's one of the great criticisms, not only of the Communist Party but of the left generally.

One last question: on unemployment, a vital question of the moment. What should our strategy be? How do we get employed and organised workers fighting together for the unemployed?

I don't think you'll do it like that. I don't think you'll ever get employed workers fighting for unemployed.

Firstly, the economic causes have got to be analysed and propagated; we've got to fight for the alternative—that's central. Immediately we've got to begin to argue that the causes of unemployment are related to factors which can be cured. We must campaign to reduce the working week, to increase the number of holidays, in other words reducing the working year. The attack on unnecessary and exploitative overtime has got to be geared to the challenge of unemployment, because that does mean jobs. But at the same time you can't just say to workers "stop your overtime", because that means a cut in their income, unless we also give them a decent wage. Sharing the misery, as we put it, by sub-dividing unemployment amongst the mass of workers isn't the cure. All you're doing is reducing standards overall, in order to eliminate that sore. It seems to me that we've got to gear ourselves for a fight for improved living standards, removal of excesses which are continually being used in overtime, people doing two jobs in order to live, and so on. So all these things are linked together, and I think the trade unions have got to adopt very clear strategies. I would like to see a situation in which we had a united front in the trade union movement which said that no factory should close without our agreement, and if anybody attempts that, government or employer, we'll resist it. And we've equally got to say that not only will we deal with closures on that basis, but cut-backs in the labour force will be resisted unless you have agreement with the trade unions. Why shouldn't we do that? You see, it isn't the social need of our industry that determines its decline, but it's the economics of a system which quite frankly is not only corrupt, but narrow, selfish and not concerned with the well-being of the mass of ordinary people. So we've got to get that message across in those simple terms—that industry does belong to us not to those who are indeed ostensibly its owners.

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The Forward March of Labour Halted?

Eric Hobsbawm

(This article was given as the 1978 Marx Memorial Lecture.)

It is my privilege to give the Marx Memorial Lecture of 1978 and I want to use it to survey some developments in the British working class during the past 100 years. It is a long-established habit, on these occasions, to take the texts of Marx and Engels as our starting-point, but I shall not do so for two reasons. In the first place, as it happens, neither Marx nor Engels said much about the British working class between the end of the First International and the 1880s, and to the best of my knowledge they said nothing whatever about it exactly one hundred years ago. In fact on this very day (March 17, 1878) there appeared in an American journal the middle one of a series of five articles by Engels on the European workers (*Werke* 19, 117-138). This mentioned numerous countries from Russia to Portugal, but contained not one word about Britain. He remained totally silent—no doubt regretfully silent—about the admittedly uninspiring labour scene in this country a century ago. In the second place, and more to the point, what I wish to underline is something which a marxist analysis alone will help us to understand, but which Marx's texts cannot: that the forward march of labour and the labour movement, which Marx predicted, appears to have come to a halt in this country about twenty-five to thirty years ago. Both the working class and the labour movement since then have been passing through a period of crisis, or, if you prefer to be mealy-mouthed about it, of adaptation to a new situation. Most of us, engaged in day-today struggle, have not paid as much attention as we ought to this crisis, though we can hardly fail to be aware of some of its aspects. My purpose is to see it in the long-term perspective of the changing structure of British capitalism and the proletariat in it. I see our task as marxists, and mine as the Marx Memorial Lecturer as applying Marx's methods and general analysis concretely to our own era, and I hope Marx himself would also have seen it that way.

A Working Class Majority

It was taken for granted in the 1870s that the great majority of the British people consisted of manual workers and their families—and this meant manual workers outside agriculture. I need hardly add that the majority, even of the farming population consisted of proletarians, i.e. of wage-labourers. In both these respects Britain was then peculiar and probably unique: in the enormous size and percentage of its manual working classes and in the relatively small size and percentage of its agricultural population, and above all its insignificant peasantry. This had some significant political consequences, which are still in some ways felt. Whereas in most other states at that period the introduction of a democratic voting system would still have left the manual workers in a minority, in Britain, so it was believed, they would immediately constitute a majority. The statistician Dudley Baxter in 1867 estimated the non-agricultural manual workers at just under 70 per cent of the population. So, from the point of view of the ruling classes, it was absolutely essential to gain or maintain the political support of an important section of the working class in one way or another. They could not hope to offset an independent class conscious party of the proletariat by mobilising the majority of peasants, petty craftsmen and shopkeepers, etc., whether with or against the working class. They had to come to terms with the fact of a working class majority from the time of the Second Reform Act onwards.

Decline of Manual Occupations

I shall leave aside for the moment the question whether what was understood by "manual workers" in the 1860s and 1870s is what we would today call a working class or proletariat. However, whatever they were, they got their hands dirty, and for most of the past century the manual workers in this broad definition have not grown but declined. In 1911 they included about 75 per cent of the population, in 1931 about 70 per cent, in 1961 64 per cent and in 1976 a little over half.

This does not, of course, mean that the percentage of proletarians in the technical sense has gone down, i.e. of people who earn their living by selling their labour-power for wages, plus their dependents. On the contrary, in this sense proletarianisation has, as Marx predicted, continued to increase. We cannot accurately measure the per-

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centage of "employers and proprietors" for the 19th century, but in 1911 it included less than 7 per cent of the occupied population and it has since gone down—after staying more or less stable until 1951—to something like 3½ per cent in the middle 1960s. So we have, over this century, growing proletarianisation combined with the relative decline, within the wage-earning population, of the manual workers in the literal sense of the word.

This is a very general phenomenon in the industrial countries. However, in Britain the decline is particularly striking for a special historical reason. A hundred years ago the sector of white-collar work in the widest sense employed only a tiny number of wage-earners; probably relatively less than in other countries with a substantial bureaucracy, public and private. For instance, in 1871 "commercial occupations" as a whole occupied less than 200,000 out of about 12 millions, whereas by 1911 it already included about 900,000. By 1976 about 45 per cent of the occupied population could be classified as non-manual.

Here, then, is the first major development of the past hundred years. But let us look more closely at the manual workers. A hundred years ago industry depended on manual labour to an extent we find difficult to grasp today, since the technology of the Industrial Revolution which Britain pioneered, and which made this country into the "workshop of the world", was, by modern standards, extremely undeveloped; it was in fact, as Raphael Samuel has recently reminded us, a "juxtaposition of hand and steam-powered technology". It was, to use the modern term, enormously labour-intensive. Craft skills of the kind associated with the pre-industrial artisans, were no doubt to some extent supplemented or speeded up by power and machinery, but they were not yet to any extent replaced by it. Not until the end of the century were automatic machine-tools seriously introduced into British engineering workshops. Other operations, skilled or less skilled, relied almost entirely on manpower. Practically every ton of coal—which supplied the overwhelming bulk of power for all purposes—was got by men with picks and shovels.

Two Consequences

These characteristics of 19th century British production had two consequences. In the first place, growth of output was linked to an expansion in the workforce to an extent it is difficult to recall today. Thus between 1877 and 1914 the tonnage of coal produced in British pits just about doubled —and so did the number of coal-miners. On the eve of world war one something like one and a quarter million men (plus their families) were required simply to produce Britain's coal. Today the spectacularly larger energy requirements of Britain, including coal, oil, gas, electricity and nuclear power, do not require more than a fraction of this enormous labour force. The army of labour was constantly growing. But in the second place, the relative backwardness of mechanisation by 20th century standards gave the British worker whose manual skill and experience was indispensable—and this included others besides apprenticed craftsmen—considerable strength in collective bargaining. British trade unionism was therefore already strong or potentially strong, even in industries in which, elsewhere, it was notoriously weak, as in cotton-mills. Unionism was recognised by government a little more than a century ago, and —leaving aside particular areas and industries—no systematic and consistent attempt to smash it as a whole was made thereafter, or succeeded for any length of time. At the same time the peculiar structure of British trade unionism also reflected—and still reflects— this historic past.

Pattern of Union Organisation

Thus, unlike many other countries, our unions are not a small number of giants each covering in theory all workers within a specified industry. Though this pattern of industrial unionism was favoured, and at one time militantly advocated, by the socialists, it was not generally successful. Even on the railways, as we know, the rivalry between industrial and sectional unions has not been eliminated. Instead—or rather side by side with such industrial tendencies—we have the coexistence of craft unions and, a phenomenon peculiar on this scale to Britain, the great "general unions" which gradually absorbed those not eligible for, or wanted by craft unions, those too weak to form them, and a variety of others. Furthermore, in some ways this tendency, which was first established in the period of the great dock strike of 1889, continues to reassert itself. Smaller unions have increasingly tended to amalgamate into bigger ones; but while these amalgamations could be seen, in the first half of the present century, as steps towards a sort of industrial unionism, in the past twenty years they have looked increasingly like the formation of new conglomerates of the "general union" type—as with the merger of the AUEW with the foundrymen and the draughtsmen and the ETU with the plumbers. Conversely, the enormous potential strength of the "craftsman" type of worker continued to be felt in unionism, particularly in the great complex of metalworking, engineering and electrical industries which went on expanding as the old 19th century industries of mass employment, such as textiles, mining and transport, contracted. When mass unionism came to these industries in the 1930s and

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during the war, it was initially through the craftsmen—often, as in the aircraft industry, men who still worked, and sometimes thought, in the old terms of craft pride. As late as 1939 the men at Harland and Shorts in Belfast still refused to accept piece-rates, as their grandfathers had done in the craft unions of Marx's day. These were the men who spread unionism into the motor industry; who kept the average engineering factory as a collection of separate craft unions, and, incidentally, who sent the women and the non-craftsmen to be organised by the T&GWU, which has thus become the majority union in the motor industry. And, incidentally, this persistence of multiple unionism in so many factories made rank-and-file inter-union co-ordination by such people as shop-stewards so formidable a force on the British industrial scene.

Historic Transformation

I have stressed these historic continuities. But they are combined with one major historic transformation. A century ago the working class was deeply stratified, though this did not prevent it from seeing itself as a class. The very people who were the backbone of trade unionism, perhaps with the exception of the miners, were, and were seen as, a labour aristocracy which looked down on the mass of those whom it regarded as unskilled, "mere labourers". But industrial change first threatened, and then eroded this superiority from three directions. In the first place the rise of tertiary employment—white-collar and professional employment—produced a new form of labour aristocracy which identified directly with the middle class. It is only since world war two—at least outside the public sector—that the white-collar workers and professional workers have organised as a mass in trade unions, and increasingly within the TUC, i.e. the conscious labour movement. In the second place modern technology increasingly created a stratum of professionals and technicians separately recruited from outside rather than promoted from those with workshop experience. So the gap between the labour aristocracy and the middle strata widened. On the other hand modern technology and industrial organisation threatened the privileged position of the labour aristocrat, by increasingly turning him into, or replacing him by, the less skilled process worker operating specialised machines, or carrying out specialised parts of an increasingly elaborate division of labour. In other words, as Marx had predicted and as the capitalists always intended, skill was increasingly transferred from men to machines or to the design of the flow of production. In fact the labour aristocracy was threatened with dilution. Thus the labour aristocrats were not only forced further away from the middle strata, but closer to the other strata of the working class, although their economic advantage (as distinct from their position in the social structure) was not seriously weakened before the first world war. They tended to be radicalised, especially in the great complex of industries in which mechanisation, mass production, and similar changes in the organisation of industry produced the most direct confrontation between the skilled worker and the new threats, in the growing complex of the metalworking industries.

Now I would like to note, in passing, that my explanation of this process is a little different from Engels', though it does not actually conflict with it. Engels, who wrote about these problems in the 1880s (notably in the new Prefaces to his *Condition of the Working Class*), stressed two things: the formation of a "relatively comfortable" and ideologically moderate labour aristocracy in Britain, and the world monopoly of British industrial capitalism which provided benefits for *all* British workers, though disproportionate ones for the labour aristocracy. But "even the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then" (Preface 1892, *Marx & Engels on Britain*, p. 31). He expected a radicalisation of the British working class as a result of the decline in the British world monopoly, but he did not foresee this happening among the labour aristocracy of the "old unions", but rather by the emergence of labour-organisation among the hitherto unorganised masses, whose minds were "free from the inherited 'respectable' prejudices which hampered the brains of the better situated 'old' Unionists" (p. 32). What he did not appreciate sufficiently were the developments in capitalist production which were to radicalise the former labour aristocracy itself, at any rate in the growth industries of the 20th century. But in the 1880s these were not yet very visible.

A Common Style of Proletarian Life

All this does not mean that the working class became a single homogeneous mass, although in many ways it was drawn more closely together, by a growing class consciousness, by political demands which united workers of all strata and sections—for instance, in the fields covered by local government, of education, of health and social security—by a common life-style and pattern, and, for a minority, of labour and socialist ideology. This common "style", if I may so call it, of British proletarian life, began to emerge just about a century ago, was formed in the 1880s and 1890s, and remained dominant until it began to be eroded in the 1950s. I am thinking not only of the rise of the socialist movement and the Labour Party as the mass party of British workers, the

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changes in trade unionism, the enormous and unbroken increase in the number of co-op members from half a million in 1880 to three million in 1914, but of non-political aspects of working-class life; of the rise of football as a mass proletarian sport, of Blackpool as we still know it today, of the fish-and-chip shop—all products of the 1880s and 1890s, or at the earliest the 1870s; the famous cap immortalised by the Andy Capp cartoon, which is, broadly speaking, Edwardian; and a little later—they had hardly developed much before world war one—of the council flat or house, of the picture palace, of the *palais de danse*.

Changes in British Capitalism

At the same time the nature of British capitalism has changed profoundly, in four ways. *First,* as suggested, it has been transformed as a system of production by technology, mass production and the enormous concentration of the productive unit—i.e. the plant in which people work. In 1961 about half of all workers in manufacturing establishments worked in plants of more than 500 workers, about a quarter in establishments over 2,000, less than 10 per cent in units of 50 or under. *Second,* the rise of monopoly capitalism with a massive public sector has concentrated employment even more, and in particular created a huge sector of government and other public employees such as simply did not exist a century ago. Today something like 30 per cent of all people work in the public sector—as employees of government, local authorities, nationalised industries, etc., and the proportion is rising. That is to say, for every two people employed in the private sector (I omit employers and self-employed) there is now roughly one in the public sector. *Third,* it follows that the factors which determine the workers' conditions are no longer, to any major extent, those of capitalist competition. The capitalist sector is no longer one dominated by the free market, since it is largely monopolised; and the public sector, both as an employer, as the provider of all manner of social services and payments, and as the manager of the economy, very largely determines them, or at least the limits within which they are fixed. Political and not profit decisions determine it. And *fourth,* the actual standard of living of most workers has been revolutionised for the better. Several of these trends can be traced back to the period between Marx's death and world war one, but the really dramatic transformation has occurred since 1939.

This has implied a number of changes within the working class, quite apart from the growing division between a manual working class which increasingly tended to vote for its class party and a white-collar stratum which, at least outside the public sector, was predominantly conservative, until in the last twenty years or so it has also begun to organise itself on trade unionist lines, and—perhaps to a lesser extent—to turn politically leftwards. I shall mention some of them.

Women Workers

First, the organised working class a hundred years ago was almost entirely masculine, as Engels himself noted; except in the textile industry. Insofar as women worked for wages which was primarily before and after marriage, for in 1914 only about 10 per cent of married women were so employed, they were regarded as unskilled and treated as cheap labour. The largest by far—44 per cent in 1881—in any case worked as servants. Even in 1911, when service had already begun to decline as an occupation, there were still a million and a half maids. That was the "Downstairs" of "Upstairs and Downstairs". Though there was already a remarkable influx of women into industry, and even more into office work and shop work in the quarter-century before 1914, women continued to be, and still continue to be, treated only too often as a sort of second-class worker, and the demand for equal pay did not make any serious headway until after world war two. And though the employment for wages of married women increased a little between the wars—in 1931 13 per cent of all married women were so employed—the practice did not become normal until after world war two. Since 1951 the number of married women technically described as "occupied" has gone up from about one-fifth to about half. This is a major change in the composition of the working class.

Immigration and the Working Class

Geographically, the working class a century ago was, in spite of all migration and mobility, a collection of localised communities. It is still locally rooted to a much greater extent than the middle classes, as anyone can tell as soon as a trade unionist from Birmingham or Gateshead, not to mention Clydebank or Swansea, opens his or her mouth. But, on the whole, such local differences did not run counter to the sense of a single class consciousness, but were part of it. The differences between Lancashire and Yorkshire workers did not prevent—they may even have underlined—their common characteristics as workers. Even the growing differences—especially between the wars—between the old 19th century industrial areas of the North, of Scotland and Wales, and the new industrial areas of the Midlands and the Southeast, did not produce greater division of feeling and attitude. The one exception

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to this was nationality (or in the case of the main immigrant group, the Irish, nationality-cum-religion). Here, as Marx himself had realised, there was a force which did deeply split the British working class, at least potentially, as witness the political history of Merseyside. And if the rivalries between the supporters of Sheffield United and Sheffield Wednesday, of Notts. County and Notts. Forest, did not so much divide as underline the basic unity of workers in those cities, we all know that the supporters of Rangers and Celtic, of Liverpool and Everton, of Hearts and Hibs., divided on national religious lines. Still, the striking thing about the British working classes is, how little—I would say how increasingly little—they were affected by such national splits until the 1950s, in spite of the very obvious fact that Scotsmen, Welshmen and Irishmen were proudly conscious of *not* being Englishmen; and the other way round. Unlike, say, the Poles in imperial Germany, the Irish in Britain, if organised at all, joined the all-British unions and supported the all-British party of their class, at all events after Ireland had become independent. Until the labour movement as a whole entered upon its present crisis, there was no significant mass base for nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales, and until the mass immigration from the former empire after world war two one would have said that working-class racism was probably less significant in Britain than, say, in France—even allowing for anti-Irish, and from the early 1900s, some localised anti-Jewish feeling. If anything, it looked like being a declining force for three-quarters of a century after 1878. Here is another significant and unwelcome development of the past quarter of a century.

Sectional Differences

But there are other divisions within the working class.

A hundred years ago there were three main sectional differences within the working class: between industries and particular branches, firms or localities in an industry (e.g. Tyneside and the Southwest); between various grades and levels of workers (e.g. "craftsmen" and "labourers"); and between rival groups within the same level or grade, as between different groups of the skilled. As to the first, local and regional differentials were high and probably growing a hundred years ago; but have tended to diminish since 1900, though at times when some regions were relatively prosperous and others very depressed, as between the wars, they could remain very large in practice because of unemployment. In theory the rise of state monopoly capitalism and employment in the public sector has also tended to even them out. In practice things are more complicated. This is not the place to discuss these problems in greater detail.

Demarcation

As to sectional differences between rival groups of the same level, these have a long history. They caused conflicts chiefly when groups tried to keep a monopoly of particular jobs for themselves against others, either because technical progress undermined their natural monopoly of long training and skill, or because in times of unemployment there was more pressure to fill a limited number of jobs. Thus bitter demarcation disputes in the Northeastern shipyards reached a peak in the 1890s, and this industry and area is still familiar with them. As the old division of labour became technologically obsolescent, such rival or potentially competing groups of specialised workers have often tended to amalgamate—e.g. by the merger of the boilermakers, shipwrights and blacksmiths—but this kind of sectionalism is far from dead. Indeed it has increased inasmuch as modern industrial development cuts across trade sectionalism and makes it possible for different industries or groups of workers to carry out what are essentially the same or alternative processes. Thus in 1878 there could be no overlap between, say, compositors and journalists, but with modern technology which enables a journalist to type straight on to the press, there can and is. Containerisation produces potential and actual conflicts between dockers, lorry-drivers and railwaymen which simply did not and could not exist in 1878 or even much later. And so on. Some coalminers would prefer the shutting down of the nuclear power industry, but workers in that industry presumably would not. Hence I would suggest that this type of sectionalism, probably after a period when it tended to decline, has been on the increase since world war two, and this is a dangerous development.

Stratification

The third kind of sectionalism, stratification, was kept largely out of sight a hundred years ago, for two reasons. First, the favoured strata (such as the so-called labour aristocracy) were still rather successful at restricting entry to their trades or keeping themselves in a favoured position by being, on the whole, the only ones with access to effective organisation. In fact, there is little doubt that at that period unionism reinforced exclusiveness. Only in the period of socialist leadership, at first very slowly, but more rapidly from the great labour unrest before world war one, did trade unions come to be factors for evening out rather than for increasing local, trade and grade differentials. Second, a hundred years ago wages and con-

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ditions were still largely fixed by custom and convention, and only partly by pure market calculation. The bourgeoisie paid as little as they could, but even when they could afford to, thought there ought to be a ceiling above which workers' wages should never rise, and they could think so because workers thought in terms of "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work", depending on the sort of workers they were. Their limit was a lot lower than the sky. Now neither of these observations is any longer true. The old hierarchies have been undermined by technological change and differentials have been eroded, particularly by the development of complex, not systematically planned, opaque and unpredictable changes in wage-payment, which no longer give an automatic advantage to skill—e.g. payment by results, systematic overtime, and some of the effects of productivity bargaining. And (especially in the great boom period after world war two) the workers learned that the limit of their demands is a lot nearer the sky than most of them ever imagined, and the employers were willing to make concessions they would have regarded as unthinkable earlier. These tendencies can, I think, be traced back to the Edwardian period, for they can be detected in some syndicalist arguments.

A Growth of Sectionalism

Now all this suggests that the old working class stratifications would lose their significance, and—with all the survivals of old divisions and tensions—common working class interests should increasingly prevail. And this probably happened in the first half of this century. But it would be a mistake to think that this has made the working class more homogeneous. On the contrary, it seems to me that we now see a growing division of workers into sections and groups, each pursuing its own economic interests irrespective of the rest. What is new here is that their ability to do so is no longer related to traditional criteria such as their technical qualifications and standing on, as it were, the social ladder. In fact it now often happens not only (as sometimes occurred even 100 years ago) that groups of workers strike, not minding the effect on the rest—e.g. skilled men on labourers—but that the strength of a group lies not in the amount of loss they can cause to the employer, but in the inconvience they can cause to the public, i.e. to other workers (e.g. by power-blackouts or whatever). This is a natural consequence of a state-monopoly capitalist system in which the basic target of pressure is not the bank-account of private employers but, directly or indirectly, the political will of the government. In the nature of things such sectional forms of struggle not only create potential friction between groups of workers, but risk weakening the hold of the labour movement as a whole. The sense of class solidarity may be further weakened by the fact that the real income of a family may no longer actually depend on a worker's own job alone, but even more on whether their wives or husbands also work and what sort of jobs they have, or on various other factors not directly determined by the union struggle. In short, though there are plenty of material and moral reasons for solidarity, and a few dramatic recent examples of it—as over the Industrial Relations Act in 1970-1 and the miners' strikes—there's not much doubt that sectionalism is on the increase.

The Poor

There is one final division within the working class, which in some ways recalls the divisions of a hundred years ago, though conditions are quite different. It is between those who could take full advantage of the great economic and social improvements of the post-war era and those who couldn't—if you like, those who would, a century ago, have been called "the poor". There are the people in persistently low-paid occupations virtually beyond the range of effective trade unions. There are the quarter of all households which get more than half their household income from social security and earn less than £40 a week; the people who live in private rented accommodation as against those who own houses and rent council housing: in 1975 17 per cent of unskilled workers were private tenants as against 11 per cent of skilled workers: the poor who live worse and pay more. And when we consider these, let us not forget that, by international standards British wages have fallen behind others, and the British social security system, of which we were so proud in the immediate post-war years, has probably fallen even further behind the social security systems of several other European countries. It is the poor who are disproportionately worse off, and whom the established modes of labour organisations help least directly. A hundred years ago the labour movement recommended its forms of struggle and organisation to everybody—trade unions, co-ops, etc. But it was then not *accessible* to everybody, but only to favoured strata of workers. Let us ask ourselves whether there isn't a similar complacency among some sections of the movement today.

Class Consciousness

Now how far does the development of class consciousness of the British working class reflect these trends? Let us take the most elementary index of it, trade unionism. This undoubtedly increased pretty steadily from a century ago, though

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we haven't any comparable figures before the 1890s: say from 13 per cent of the labour force in 1900 to 45 per cent just after world war two (1948). But thereafter it remained stagnant for quite a bit, or even dropped a little, and though it grew in the 1960s and 1970s, it is now only a little higher (as a percentage) than in 1948—46 per cent. And—a point we don't often note—it is much lower than in Denmark, Sweden and Belgium, where it is around 70 per cent and actually a little lower than Italy. Now of course the composition of trade unionism has changed—there are a lot more women and white-collar workers—but the point I wish to note regretfullly is that 35 per cent of the employed are not in any trade union, and that this percentage has not declined for thirty years. And also, that Britain, the home of mass trade unionism, has clearly fallen behind some other countries.

Declining Vote

If we look at the political expression of class consciousness, which means in practice, support for the Labour Party, the picture is even more troubling. The number and percentage of Labour voters (including Communist ones) grew without interruption (except for 1931) between 1900 and 1951 when it reached a peak of 14 millions or just under 49 per cent of all votes. After that it went down to 44 per cent in 1959 and 1964, rose again to just over 48 per cent in 1966 and then fell again. At the last elections it was well under 40 per cent. What is more, in *absolute* figures Labour (plus Communist) after 1951 barely ever got to within one million of its then vote, and in 1974 it polled about 2½ million less than in 1951, less than in *any* election since 1935. Of course this trend also affected the Conservatives who reached their all-time peak (13¾ million) in 1959, but that is no consolation.

There is no equally simple way of measuring the highest degree of class consciousness, namely socialist consciousness, but if we are to take the active membership of all socialist organisations as a very rough criterion—as distinct from trade union activism—then I also suspect that from some time after the early 1950s there is a decline, perhaps broken in the late 1960s. However, a very high proportion of the *new* socialist activists inside and outside the CP and other marxist groups, in this most recent period, have probably been not manual workers, and especially not younger manual workers, but students and white-collar or professional workers. Of course we ought to note that until the 1950s very many, and perhaps most, of these new socialist activists, often from working class and white-collar families, would not have been able to go to colleges.

Marx and Engels

So it seems to me that for the first seventy years or so of the last century, Marx and Engels would have been neither very surprised nor very disappointed by the tendencies of development in the British working class. Not very surprised, because the tendencies were such as they predicted, or might have predicted, on the basis, e.g. of Marx's own analysis of the development of the factory system; though I think they would have been a bit surprised by the speed with which the tertiary sector developed, though perhaps not so much by the formation of a new conservative white-collar labour aristocracy. They would not have been very disappointed by, because they did not expect very much from the British working class beyond what actually looked like happening, the growth of a mass political party based on class consciousness, separate from the parties of the bourgeoisie, and increasingly if vaguely committed to replacing capitalism by socialism. Of course, like you and me, Marx and Engels might well have wanted the British working class to be a bit more revolutionary and, like you and me, they would have been pretty contemptuous of the Labour leadership, but things did look like moving in the right general direction. But in the past thirty years this movement seems to have got stuck, except for one trend: the "new" labour aristocracy of white-collar technical and professional workers has become unionised, and the students and intellectuals—from whom it is largely recruited—have also been radicalised to a greater extent than before.

The Crisis—Not Inevitable

I have already suggested some of the developments in the economic and social structure of the country and its working population which might explain this. But marxists are not economic and social determinists, and it simply won't do to say that this crisis of the working class and the socialist movement was "inevitable", i.e. that nothing could have been done about it. We have already seen that the halt in the forward march began even before the dramatic changes of the past twenty years; that even at the peak of the "affluent society" and the great capitalist boom, in the middle 1960s, there were signs of a real recovery of impetus and dynamism: the resumed growth of trade unions, not to mention the great labour struggles, the sharp rise in the Labour vote in 1966, the radicalisation of students, intellectuals and others in the late 1960s. If we are to explain the stagnation or crisis, we have to look at the Labour Party and the labour movement itself. The workers, and growing strata outside the manual workers, were looking to it for a lead and

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a policy. They didn't get it. They got the Wilson years—and many of them lost faith and hope in the mass party of the working people.

Economist Militancy

At the same time the trade union movement became more militant. And yet this was, with the exception of the great struggles of 1970-4, an almost entirely *economist* militancy; and a movement is not necessarily less economist and narrow-minded because it is militant, or even led by the left. The periods of maximum strike activity since 1960—1970-2 and 1974—have been the ones when the percentage of pure wage strikes have been much the highest—over 90 per cent in 1971-2. And, as I have tried to suggest earlier, straightforward economist trade union consciousness may at times actually set workers against each other rather than establish wider patterns of solidarity.

So my conclusion is that the development of the working class in the past generation has been such as to raise a number of very serious questions about its future and the future of its movement. What makes this all the more tragic is that we are today in a period of world crisis for capitalism, and, more specifically, of the crisis—one might almost say the breakdown—of the British capitalist society; i.e. at a moment when the working class and its movement should be in a position to provide a clear alternative and to lead the British peoples towards it.

Forward March Faltered

We cannot rely on a simple form of historical determinism to restore the forward march of British labour which began to falter thirty years ago. There is no evidence that it will do so automatically. On the other hand, as I have already stressed, there is no reason for automatic pessimism. Men, as Marx said (the German word means men and women), make their history in the circumstances that history has provided for them and within its limits—but it is they who *make* their history. But if the labour and socialist movement is to recover its soul, its dynamism, and its historical initiative, we, as marxists, must do what Marx would certainly have done: to recognise the novel situation in which we find ourselves, to analyse it realistically and concretely, to analyse the reasons, historical and otherwise, for the failures as well as the successes of the labour movement, and to formulate not only what we would want to do, but what can be done. We should have done this even while we were waiting for British capitalism to enter its period of dramatic crisis. We cannot afford not to do it now that it has.

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Early Communist Strategy for Britain: An Assessment

Monty Johnstone

(The following is an abridged version of a paper given to the Conference on the History of the Communist Party organised in London on May 20-21 by the Party's History Group.)

The Communist Party of Great Britain was born under the impetus of the great October Revolution and of the revolutionary wave which shook Europe at the end of the first world war and which, in 1919, brought into existence the Third—Communist—International. It was formed out of a fusion of a number of small revolutionary Marxist and semi-Marxist organisations, for whom the October Revolution ushered in a period of world socialist revolution that would bring the establishment of working class political power in Britain. They had been working over the years through thick and thin to win the British workers for such an objective. They now saw this, with an understandable surfeit of optimism, as already on the horizon.

National Convention

The National Convention to establish the Communist Party was summoned in 1920 by a joint provisional committee representing the British Socialist Party, the Communist Unity Group and the South Wales Communist Council. In its circular of invitation it specified three "fundamental bases of Communist unity: (a) The Dictatorship of the working class; (b) The Soviet System; (c) The Third International". These had already been described by Lenin as the cardinal principles of the international Communist movement. In the call for a Communist Party that accompanied the invitation to the Unity Convention, there was emphasised the need for acceptance as an "essential principle" of the new party of "the Soviet idea as against Parliamentary democracy, i.e. a structure making provision for the participation in social administration only of those who render useful service to the community".

All the Communist Parties that were formed during this period were similarly influenced by the Soviet form of organisation which had been the basis of the October Revolution as well as spreading to some other European countries and resulting in the establishment of short-lived Soviet republics in Bavaria and Hungary in 1919. Lenin and the Communist International had come to believe that Soviets were the "international form of the struggle of the proletariat". Such workers' councils would be set up in opposition to the existing state apparatus with Parliament at its head in bourgeois democratic countries. They would constitute a form of dual power challenging that state apparatus and ultimately replacing it in a revolution led by the Communist Party. Their establishment as organs of state power would entail "the unification of the legislative and executive authorities" and "the substitution of production units, like the factories and works, for the territorial electoral constituencies".[1] Until the second world war this remained our Party's strategic aim. However, the degree of immediacy with which its realisation was posed differed from period to period.

Assessing the Labour Party

Whilst the Unity Convention of 1920 was unanimous in its acceptance of these fundamental principles there were two other issues which were seen at the time as of subsidiary tactical significance, but which, in fact, assumed an importance which gave them strategic status. The first was the question of participation in elections; the second was the problem, that is still with us today, of our relationship with and attitude to the Labour Party. On both these questions the advice of Lenin was of considerable importance in overcoming deep-rooted sectarian views in the young Communist Party, which flowed from the political background of some of the groups that formed the Party.

On elections the Convention decided by 186 votes to 19, as Lenin had recommended, to support parliamentary and electoral action as a valuable means of "propaganda and agitation towards revolution", whilst regarding what they called the "reformist" view that a socialist revolution could be achieved through parliament as absolutely incorrect. It was a question of using the heightened political awareness at the time of elections the better to popularise the Communist pro-

[1] V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works* (Moscow/London, 1937), Volume 7, p. 232.

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gramme, indeed the better to denounce the very parliamentary system under which the elections were being held. And when Communists were elected to the bourgeois parliament, they were to use it as a forum from which to counterpose the conception of a Soviet system to it.

On the attitude to be taken towards the Labour Party, the Convention was more evenly divided. The Labour Party was in 1920, and remains in 1978 (and I hope I won't be accused of being defeatist if I say it is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future) the mass political organisation based on the British working class, vastly outnumbering the Communist Party or any other organisation claiming adherence to socialism. This has always presented British Communists with problems very different from those which face for instance the Communist Parties of France and Italy.

After a full debate, the Convention decided by 100 votes to 85 to apply for affiliation to the Labour Party. Lenin had emphasised that, as distinct from continental social democratic parties, the Labour Party's federal structure and trade union affiliations made it important that Communists should try to become affiliated to it, in the same way as the British Socialist Party, the main constituent organisation that had gone into the Communist Party, had affiliated to it in 1916. The condition that he emphasised for affiliation was that the Communist Party should be able to preserve its freedom to criticise the right-wing Labour leaders.

Lenin was at this time making an analysis of the nature of the Labour Party which distinguished two contradictory elements in it. He told the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920: "Of course for the most part the Labour Party consists of workers, but it does not logically follow from this that every workers' party which consists of workers is at the same time a 'political workers' party', that depends upon who leads it, upon the content of its activities and of its political tactics. Only the latter determines whether it is really a political proletarian party. From this point of view . . . the Labour Party is not a political workers' party but a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although it consists of workers, it is led by reactionaries."[2] He saw the job of the Communists to act as an autonomous revolutionary body inside the Labour Party seeking to win the support of its members against these "reactionaries". When he used the famous phrase about supporting Labour as the rope supports the hanging man (which Tommy Jackson infelicitously adapted to taking the Labour leaders by the hand the better to take them by the throat!), he was referring to these leaders rather than to the Labour Party as an organisation.

Electoral Policy

The affiliation application to the Labour Party was turned down by a large majority. Discussions between representatives of the two parties broke down on the Labour leaders' insistence that the issue was one of parliamentary democracy versus "Soviet dictatorship". But the Communist Party still decided that, affiliated or not, it would support Labour candidates in constituencies where no Communists were standing. The general view was that Communist candidates should only contest in a limited number of constituencies. This was in keeping with Lenin's advice to the Executive Committee of the Comintern in January 1922 to adopt "a thoroughly motivated resolution demanding from the Communist Party of Great Britain that all Communists should agitate and vote in elections for Labour candidates, excluding those extremely few places where it is certain that voting for a Communist will not help the capitalist candidate to win".[3]

Lenin insisted in his *"Left Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder* that the workers learn not only by propaganda, but by their own political experience. Therefore, before they could be won over to support the revolutionary line of the Communists, the workers needed to see in practice the bankruptcy of the Labour leaders. He believed with that over-optimism, which then characterised the world Communist movement, that once the workers had had the experience of a Labour government they would draw revolutionary conclusions. Although this has still not happened despite several unhappy experiences of such governments, it does not invalidate the basic point stressed by Lenin that Labour workers have first got to convince themselves in practice of the inadequacy of reformist governments before they can be expected to change their outlook.

National Left Wing Movement

Lenin himself, to the best of my knowledge, was never explicit on whether or not a transformation of the Labour Party could be envisaged. However, in these early years of the Party, British Communists voiced different views on this question. At the Sixth (Manchester) Conference of the Party in May 1924, in his Chairman's address, William Gallacher expressed what was then the majority

[2] *Lenin on Britain* (London, 1934), p. 267.

[3] Quoted from Comintern archives by B. N. Ponomaryov in *World Marxist Review*, February 1969, p. 3.

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view "The Communist Party does not attack the Labour Party." The Communist Party must strive all the time to make the Labour Party a useful organ of the workers in the struggle against capitalism, but we do attack the leadership of the Labour Party and will go on attacking it until the labour movement has forced it, either to prosecute a working class policy or to make way for a leadership that will do so." The resolution passed by the conference on relations with the Labour Party stated: "The Communist Party considers it its duty to enter into the ranks of the Labour Party in order to strengthen the militant and fighting elements of the labour movement, and to unmask the treacherous elements in the Labour Party and free the workers from their influence."

Early the next year R. Palme Dutt made a different assessment in an article in *The Communist International,* insisting that the role of the Communist Party was "to replace the failure and decomposition of the Labour Party". He was answered by J. T. Murphy, another member of the Party leadership of the period, who rejected Dutt's talk of the disintegration of the Labour Party at a time when it was growing. The job, he argued, was to revolutionise the Labour Party by replacing right-wing leaders by left-wingers and Communists.

The General Strike—A Crucial Test

In November 1925 the first National Left Wing Conference was held with Tom Mann, Joe Vaughan (Labour Party), Joseph Southall (ILP) and William Paul (the Communist editor of the *Sunday Worker* founded early that year and claiming a circulation approaching 100,000). The declared aim was "not to supersede the Labour Party but to 'remould it nearer to the heart's desire' of the rank and file". The National Left Wing Movement which was to emerge was characterised by close and fruitful co-operation between the Communists and the increasing numbers of Labour Party members moving to the left, for more than two years following its formation in September 1926.

The main attempt to outline British Communist strategy in this period was made by William Paul in *The Path to Power.* First published by the Party in October 1924, a new expanded edition was brought out a year later, after "Red Friday", anticipating the forthcoming struggle that was to shake Britain in May 1926 in the shape of the General Strike. The pamphlet was an amplification in contemporary British terms of the strategy of a Soviet road to socialism, although Paul was careful to avoid the Russian word and to proceed from British rather than Russian premises. He argued that the "final struggle between the old and the new", the beginning of which he now saw opening in Britain, would compel the revolutionary movement "to sweep away the old machinery and replace it with new forms . . . breaking the political organs of the old system and forcing forward the new organs". He saw these organs growing out of the new structure of the trade union movement emerging "while capitalism is driving the industrial struggle of the workers towards a political uprising". He went on to refer specifically to the General Council of the TUC which "represents a move towards concentration and centralisation of class power" and the trades councils which, as in the 'Hands off Russia Movement' in 1920, were already setting up Councils of Action. "Thus, locally and nationally, there are in existence the rudiments of a new political structure with all its roots in the productive and distributive processes related to the control of the means of human existence," he contended. Any serious industrial struggle must inevitably lead to open conflict with the state, culminating in "a trial of strength between the old political methods of capitalism and the new political instrument of the masses based upon their industrial organisation". The influence of the Communist Party would be "overwhelming, during such an upheaval, because it is the only political organisation in the country that builds up its most important sections inside the workshops". The more open the class struggle became, the more readily would the masses "realise the emptiness of parliamentary democracy" and the more determination would they show "in securing their needs over the heads of parliamentary obstacles, by creating their own governmental machinery".

The General Strike was a crucial test of the viability of such a strategy. It was the only time in the Party's history when there have appeared the main elements which were believed to favour the perspective of a Soviet-type revolution as expounded so plausibly by William Paul on the eve of the General Strike—and still advanced, but with much less credibility, by those latter day Bourbons of the various leftist organisations who have forgotten nothing and learnt nothing from the last half century.

Councils of Action

Whilst Councils of Action did emerge and play an important role in the strike, they nowhere assumed the shape of a new political structure which could be counterposed to and eventually replace the parliamentary forms of national political representation. The Party acted in keeping with the realities of the situation, which meant shelving the strategy that had been considered in advance to be appropriate to this sort of class confrontation. Hence its three main demands in the strike

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were: (1) full support for the miners behind A. J. Cook's slogan "Not a penny off the pay, not a second on the day"; (2) the nationalisation of the mines without compensation and under workers' control; (3) a Labour government.

Lecturing on this period in 1952, John Mahon observed: "The Communist Party in 1926 never thought out what the situation would be if the Party's demands were followed. It failed to clarify its perspective. We all saw the Russian Revolution as a model with the idea of Soviets and insurrection, but we did not declare this to the workers in the strike, to whom we offered no real political perspective." It was to be another twenty-five years before the Party was to provide the first draft of a realistic perspective which attempted to link immediate industrial struggles and electoral objectives with a long-term advance to socialism.

Sectarian Turn

The positions actually adopted by the Party in the General Strike constituted a tacit recognition of the untenability of the strategic presuppositions to which it had subscribed. The tragedy was that, instead of leading the Party to revise this strategy along more realistic lines, the experience of the strike prepared the ground for the Party's entry into the most sterile and sectarian period of its history.

The reasons for this are to be found in a combination of national and international factors. Specifically, it involved a linking up of the sectarian reaction of a minority of the leadership to the betrayal by the General Council (in the first instance Dutt whose 1925 views on the Labour Party were now pushed much further) with the "third period" left sectarian turn of the Communist International whose high-powered intervention helped to turn this minority (six members of the CPGB's Central Committee as against sixteen) into a majority in the course of debates in Moscow and two Party congresses in 1929.[4]

Writing in *The Communist International* of June 1926 on "The Meaning of the General Strike", Dutt counterposed a mass Communist Party to the Labour Party. The reformist leaders were responsible for the collapse of 1926 and it was necessary to "fight to drive them out of the working class movement". The Labour leaders were "rotten to the core with reformism and parliamentarism and therefore incapable of giving any leadership to the class struggle of the workers save to betray it," and the Labour Party's federal structure made it "incapable of uniform centralised direction". The article, reprinted as a pamphlet, drew conclusions that contained the seeds of the ultra-left 'New Line' that was to emerge in 1928 and 1929.

In the autumn of 1927 the Comintern Executive sent a message to the Ninth CPGB Congress suggesting a review of tactics in relation to the Labour Party. It did not arrive in time for the congress, but the leaders of the International discussed it informally with Harry Pollitt and other British Party leaders who were in Moscow in November and December. A debate on "the English Question" was fixed for the Executive's ninth plenum in February 1928.

The thesis of the majority of the British Party's Central Committee was argued at the plenum by J. R. Campbell, who showed that mass support was increasing for the Labour Party at the expense of the old capitalist parties. It envisaged that the Party should continue to work for the return of a Labour Government in accordance with the tactic elaborated by Lenin. The minority thesis of Dutt and Pollitt, with Page Arnot as its main spokesman at the plenum, argued that conditions had changed since Lenin gave his advice and that since 1924 the Labour Party had become increasingly a "coalition party of the bourgeoisie", which it was the duty of the Communist Party to oppose. The Plenum largely accepted the line of the British minority in its final resolution, which was adopted unanimously.

"Revolutionary Workers' Government"

The resolution declared that it was necessary for the British Party to "change its attitude towards the Labour Party and the Labour Government and consequently to replace the slogan of the Labour Government by the slogan of the Revolutionary Workers' Government". The new slogan lacked any basis in British reality.

That summer the Sixth Congress of the Comintern approved a new sectarian strategy under the slogan of " Class against Class". It laid the basis for the "third period", which European capitalism had allegedly now entered, marking a further acute aggravation of the general crisis of capitalism (confirmed by the world economic crisis) and a consequent "radicalisation of the masses", who it was wrongly assumed would take the path to revolution.

The congress adopted the Programme of the Communist International, in which Social Democracy was described not only as counter-revolutionary, but also as playing "a Fascist role in periods when the situation is critical for capitalism". From this was to develop the increasingly frequent characterisation of Social Democratic parties and governments as "Social Fascist". The

[4] The complex relationship between the internal and international forces involved is discussed in my article "The Communist Party in the 1920s", *New Left Review*, No. 41 (January-February 1967), pp. 47-63.

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left-wing Social Democrats were described by the programme as "the most dangerous faction of the Social Democratic parties".

Disastrous Effects

The application of this "New Line" was to have particularly disastrous effects on the development of the National Left Wing Movement in Britain. The May 1927 plenum of the Comintern Executive had recognised that it had an important role to play in attempting to make the Labour Party into "a more effective instrument of working class struggle". At the second conference of the Movement in September 1927 there were 163 delegates from 54 local Labour Parties and 40 left-wing groups representing in all, it was claimed, about 150,000 people. In South Wales the Movement was achieving important electoral successes with its candidates receiving 64 per cent of the vote in the rural and urban district council elections of 1928.

Support for such a movement appeared suspect to the more extreme supporters of the "New Line" as propounded by Dutt who, in *Labour Monthly* in January 1929, dubbed the Labour Party as "the third capitalist party" and considered that "the conception of a socialistic transformation of the Labour Party needs to be denounced". They believed that if the National Left Wing Movement were to develop independently it would be in danger of intercepting people who would otherwise come into the Communist Party. This reasoning led to the Tenth Party Congress in January 1929 passing a resolution by 55 votes to 52—against the opposition of the retiring Central Committee—that Party members should leave the Movement. On Communist initiative it was then decided to disband it—no doubt to the great rejoicing of Transport House.

In the General Election of May 1929 the Party's manifesto, entitled "Class against Class", stressed its opposition to the "capitalist" Labour Party. It stated that where no Communist candidate was standing and "where the Labour candidate refuses to pledge himself to a programme of fighting for working class demands, the Communist Party advises the workers not to cast a vote for any of the capitalist candidates, Tory, Liberal or Labour". The 25 Communist candidates obtained 50,000 votes compared with 41,000 in 1924 in only six constituencies, whilst the Labour Party, allegedly discredited in the eyes of the "radicalised" workers, increased its vote by nearly 3 million and formed the government.

"Social Fascist" Labour Government

At the Eleventh Congress from November 30-December 3, 1929, Harry Pollitt, who had become General Secretary in August, delivered the main report and the decision was taken to launch the *Daily Worker* on January 1, 1930. The victory of the 'New Line' was completed with only twelve of the members of the old Central Committee being re-elected under a panel system, which for the first time replaced the "free elections" about which the Comintern Presidium had written to the Party expressing its disapproval. The political keynote of the congress was given in a resolution stressing the need to step up the fight against the new Labour government which had "already begun to show clearly its Social Fascist character, namely a policy of Fascism and violent repression of the working class, concealed by legal, democratic and Socialist phraseology". At the same time the payment of the Political Levy to the Labour Party was opposed, as was the idea of continuing to seek affiliation to it.

By the end of 1929 the 'New Line' had secured the complete isolation of the party and the decline of its membership to 3,200 despite the opportunities for advance provided by the outbreak of the world economic crisis that the Communists had predicted. (After MacDonald's betrayal in 1931 membership leaped to 6,000.) Sadly, in August 1930, the *Communist Review* was to comment that "although we have stood on the line of the Comintern . . . yet the membership continues to fall and the Party is still largely isolated from the masses".

Trade Union Controversy

This isolation was acutely felt in the Party's trade union work, on which Pollitt and Dutt argued opposing views in their contributions to discussion prior to the Party's Twelth Congress in November 1932. Pollitt wrote in the *Daily Worker* of August 20: "The Communist Party is for powerful Trade Unionism, is for strengthening the organised power of the workers which they have built up through their trade unions." Dutt replied in the *Daily Worker* of September 19: "'For a powerful united Trade Unionism.' For a powerful united General Council? . . . to speak of 'a powerful united Trade Unionism' today means to speak of a powerful united *Reformist* Trade Unionism. Does the Communist Party stand for this? Of course not. We stand for a powerful united revolutionary trade union opposition, firmly based on the Trade Union membership and the lower Trade Union organs. . . ."

Fortunately Dutt's approach was not followed by the congress. In his political report Harry Pollitt paid special attention to mass work in the trade unions as part of a "united front with the masses". Without calling into question the Comintern line which was for a united front "from below" excluding the "Social Fascist" leaders, the

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congress marked a genuine attempt to overcome some of the worst aspects of the sectarianism which resulted from the "third period" strategy.

New Policies, but . . .

A revision of the strategy itself, which had been promoted by the Comintern since 1928, was begun on its initiative after Hitler came to power in January 1933. The next month the Labour and Socialist International appealed for a united struggle against fascism, indicating its readiness to "negotiate with the Communist International with a view to common action as soon as this body is also ready". The Comintern's reply came in its appeal of March 5 recommending the Communist Parties "to approach the Central Committees of the Social Democratic Parties belonging to the Labour and Socialist International with proposals regarding joint actions against Fascism and against the capitalist offensive".

On March 11 the CPGB published a letter to the Labour Party, as well as to the ILP and other labour movement organisations, in favour of a united campaign for democratic, anti-fascist and economic demands. Whilst agreement was reached with the ILP, it was refused by the Labour Party on that and subsequent occasions on the grounds that the Communists did not believe in parliamentary democracy and majority rule and that it was necessary to oppose "the idea of dictatorship, Fascist or Communist".

Replying in May 1933 Palme Dutt wrote: *"The claim of the Labour Party to stand for democracy is a brazen lie, disproved by its whole record and practice."*[5] And even the revised edition of his *Fascism and Social Revolution* appearing in June 1935 still referred to Social Democracy as "Social Fascism" and saw it as "an episode which is beginning to draw to its close" (p. 176). The aims of Social Democracy and Fascism were the same, he alleged. "They differ only in their methods" (p. 155). The effect of such statements was not only to antagonise those to whom the appeal for unity was addressed, but to make it appear as though there was no real basis for such an appeal anyway except as a means of exposing the "social traitors" for refusing it.

Fortunately, however, better sense was to prevail. Whilst Dimitrov in Moscow was from July 1934 privately querying the use of the "Social Fascist" label,[6] in Britain the magnificent united actions against fascism, unemployment and the reactionary National Government, initiated by the Communists, were breaking down sectarian attitudes.

Supporting Labour Again

The Party's Thirteenth Congress in February 1935 put its seal on the strategic turn in relation to the Labour Party by approving a return to the policy of supporting Labour candidates in elections where no Communist was standing and calling for the return of a Labour Government in the forthcoming general election. (Indeed, when the election was held in November the Party withdrew all but two of its candidates in the interests of unity and a Labour victory.)

However, Harry Pollitt asserted unconvincingly in his report that, although this represented "a big advance in our tactics", it "in no way implies that we were wrong in our class against class tactics in 1929, and that we are now returning to the old line of 1924". The "reason for this change in our electoral tactics," he contended, "was dictated by the changed objective situation." That summer the Party also returned to its pre-1929 position of seeking affiliation to the Labour Party.

Seventh World Congress

The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in July-August 1935 gave impetus to the struggle for unity not only of the working class but also for its alliance with wider social forces which found its expression in the Popular Fronts in France and Spain. It laid the basis for the subsequent development of Communist strategy in the capitalist countries, on which to no small extent rests our present *British Road to Socialism* and its conception of a broad democratic alliance.

However, although the Seventh World Congress represented a big step forward in its attention to national conditions and traditions, it did not abandon the conception of Soviets as the universal form of transition to socialism. Thus Dimitrov declared in his famous main report: "Soviet power and *only* Soviet power can bring salvation." (Dimitrov's emphasis.)

In his speech to the congress, Harry Pollitt said: "The Communist Party in its revolutionary agitation and propaganda amongst the workers must popularise its revolutionary programme of Soviet power concretely applied to British conditions. . . . The Communist Party does not believe that socialism can be achieved through Parliament."[7]

[5] R. P. Dutt, *Democracy and Fascism* (CPGB, 1933), p. 10. Emphasis in original.

[6] See *Marxism Today*, July 1972, p. 209.

[7] H. Pollitt, *Unity against the National Government*. Report of Seventh World Congress Speech (London, 1935), pp. 23, 27. The editor of Harry Pollitt, *Selected Articles and Speeches*, Vol. I (London, 1953), deletes the words "its revolutionary programme of Soviet power" and substitutes "an adequate programme" (p. 159), and inserts the word "alone" after "Parliament" (p. 161). Our Party was unfortunately not exempt from the nauseating Stalinist practice of rewriting history.

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The perspective to which Harry Pollitt was here referring was expounded in *For Soviet Britain*, adopted in February 1935 and presented as "a special programme for the immediate situation in the world". (Introducing the programme at the Party's Thirteenth Congress, Robin Page Arnot noted that " 'Soviet Power' is the general slogan today of the Communist International, and of all its sections, as adopted a year ago at the Thirteenth Plenary Session" of its Executive.) It was also put forward in the Draft Programme issued in August 1939 for debate and adoption at the Party Congress scheduled for October 1939 (which did not in fact meet due to the situation created by the war). This envisaged that workers' councils would "arise from the conditions of the struggle for power" and would "become the basis of the new State power", and referred in support of this to the experience of Soviets in Russia and other countries. It retained the Soviet conception of indirect national representation whereby the "central popular assembly" that would replace Parliament would not be chosen by the electorate as a whole voting in constituencies, but would be "based on these local councils". The new system would "disarm the exploiters . . . and deprive them of political rights, so that they cannot harm the work of socialist construction or endeavour to win back power".

Although by 1951 such a perspective had been silently dropped several years previously, it was only in the first edition of *The British Road to Socialism*, the Party's long-term programme, published that year that it was explicitly repudiated (being described there as "a slanderous misrepresentation of our policy" by "the enemies of communism"). For the first time the bases were comprehensively laid for the Party's present strategy, envisaging the working people using their political and industrial strength for "transforming Parliament . . . into the democratic instrument of the vast majority of the people" in the struggle against capitalism. Even then, as subsequently, however, this whole change in strategy was inadequately thought out and debated theoretically and historically. It was (and often still is) baldly asserted that the strategy of the Soviet road had been correct before the war, but that "with the new balance in world forces, new paths of advance to socialism are opened up". (No doubt we have here an example of the tendency, referred to by Lukacs, always to try to present each new stage in Communist history as a continuation of the previous one, and thereby avoid the problem of explaining discontinuities.)

Never Suited to Britain

It seems to me generally correct to argue that chances for a relatively peaceful transition to socialism increase to the extent that stronger international socialist forces effectively restrict the freedom of action for capitalist counter-revolution. However this recognition does not help us to evaluate the Party's pre-war perspective of substituting Soviets for Parliament, correctly recognised in *The British Road* as "the product of Britain's historical struggle for democracy". Such a strategy involved the transposition of the forms of revolutionary struggle and power that had shown themselves suited to Russia to the very different conditions of Britain. I believe that history has shown them never to have been viable in this country as a strategy for advancing to socialism or desirable as a form of socialist state power, since the indirect form of national representation envisaged is less democratic than the direct election of Parliament by universal suffrage established in Britain through popular struggle.

What was relevant and positive in the Communist Party's early strategy was the rejection of the social democratic conception of a purely parliamentary road and the emphasis on socialist revolution replacing the bourgeois state by a new type of working class state power, which would be used against all attempts by the defeated capitalist minority undemocratically to defy the wishes of the people.[8] These were to remain important elements in the strategy outlined in *The British Road*.

A long-term strategy broadly similar to that advanced in *The British Road* would, I believe, have been more correct in the twenties and thirties than that advanced by our Party at the time. Some comrades are disdainful of the "hindsight" involved in making such a judgment. I readily admit that it is easier to reach such a conclusion with the knowledge that we today possess than it was for our comrades in those days when the whole world Communist movement believed in the universal validity of the Soviet road. But Marxists are concerned above all to learn the lessons of history. This requires that we make the most effective use of the possibilities of historical hindsight now available to us for making a critical appraisal and analysis of our own past in its strengths and in its weaknesses.

[8] Equally positive was the Party's insistence that "the break-up of the Empire . . . is an essential part of the struggle for socialism". (J. R. Campbell, *Communist Review*, September 1924, p. 224.) A particularly important role was played by R. Palme Dutt in promoting understanding of the common interests of the British workers and the colonial peoples. (This important theme did not fall within the terms of reference of my paper, since a separate workshop at the conference was devoted to it.)

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Review:

Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today

Michael Bleaney

(*The following is a review article of* Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today, *Volumes I and II, by Anthony Cutler, Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst and Athar Hussain. The writer is a Lecturer in Economics at Nottingham University and author of* Underconsumption Theories. *We will print a response by the authors of this book in a forthcoming issue.*)

This book investigates, in a supposedly rigorous fashion, some important aspects of the theoretical structure of Marx's *Capital*. It clothes its ideas in a dense verbal jungle, the penetration of which requires repeated waves of intellectual energy; and this will no doubt be off-putting to many readers. Moreover, to prefigure somewhat the conclusion of this review, there is no theoretical El Dorado to be discovered on the far side.

Nevertheless, the book does raise, indirectly, some important questions about how Marxist theory can in fact be developed, because it stands at one end of the spectrum of possible approaches. The authors are convinced that rigorous analysis of the concepts used by Marx and their logical implications allows one to judge whether in fact they are scientifically sustainable. One fairly widespread reaction to this is to condemn the whole project as arid and sterile in essence, because one cannot deepen one's knowledge simply by reflecting on concepts. While the negative judgment thereby passed on the school of thought of which these four authors are examples is probably correct, it seems to me that the reasons are wrong. The methods which are used in this book are not substantially different from those used, for instance, in the long debate on the relationship between the Old and the Young Marx, or by economists and others in debating the appropriateness of the twin concepts of productive and unproductive labour. Analysis of the conceptual foundations of theoretical works, termed by Louis Althusser "symptomatic reading", is certainly fruitful. The problem is that this book is not a good example of it.

The Classical Foundations of Marxism

The conclusions to which the authors come are clear. They are unsatisfied with the set of propositions which represent the classical foundations of Marxism, and they wish to establish Marxist theory on a new basis. They reject the concepts of value and exploitation, they reject the concept of mode of production, and they reject the interpretation of politics and ideology as class struggle. They fall back on the concepts of social formation and of conditions of existence, and they also stress the necessity of a thorough analysis of the financial system and of what they term "forms of enterprise calculation" (they regard these as central to an analysis of modern capitalism). Now the concepts of social formation and conditions of existence, as developed by the authors, are very weak ones; they will offer little support to the revolutionary theorist lost in the bog of concrete analysis. Indeed one must ask the question whether all this epistemological heart-searching has resulted in anything but a retreat into vulgar empiricism. Cutler *et al.* do recognise this danger but they do not confront it.

However, I do not wish to discuss these points, because they only arise once the authors have demonstrated to their own satisfaction the inadequacy of classical Marxism. Instead I shall focus on the main themes of their critique of classical Marxist concepts; in each case, in fact, the arguement appears to be far from watertight.

Theory of Value

Part One of Volume One discusses Marx's theory of value. This is partly a polemic against the notion of labour as the source of value, and partly an argument that if one does have such an elementary theory of value then one necessarily has a simplistic and inadequate theory of profits.

Now the accusation has long been made against the labour theory of value that it is arbitrary, dogmatic and unscientific, since it makes one factor of production (labour) the sole source of value and ignores the contribution of others (principally capital and land). Moreover, it is only because of this theory of value that profits and rent appear as surplus value, and therefore as the product of the exploitation of the labourer. So,

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the argument runs, if other factors of production were equally recognised as sources of value then profits would no more seem to be the result of exploitation of workers than wages would seem to be the result of exploitation of capital.

Such reasoning essentially regards Marx's theory of value as a theory of price and criticises it on that basis. However, it is far from certain that this is its primary function, and Hilferding is surely correct when he argues that the choice of labour as the source of value is a reflection of Marx's belief in the primacy of production relations, so that "the fundamental economic idea is identical with the fundamental idea of the materialist conception of history". In other words, Marx uses his theory of value as a conceptual tool with which to analyse capitalist production relations.

Cutler *et al.* reject Hilferding's argument, stating that this merely:

> "makes labour a trans-historical anthropological necessity. Labour is constitutive because of man's nature (materialism-naturalism) and is so throughout history (it is a trans-historical, eternal, necessity). The eternal/natural couple can be imposed upon Marxism too" (Vol. I, p. 69).

What they mean is that to postulate that production relations are primary in all societies (as Marx clearly does) is to assert a general principle valid for all history (hence eternal, or natural). But this is unproven, and so necessarily dogmatic. Therefore it must be rejected.

The associated concept of exploitation, of course, goes out with the theory of value. The point I wish to make is that there is nothing new here. The criticism of the labour theory of value as being dogmatic and arbitrary is as old as the theory itself.

Profits

The other major point which Cutler *et al.* make against Marx's theory of value is that it necessarily involves a "single, general determinant of profits" (Vol. I, p. 19). They make the same accusation against bourgeois theories of value, and clearly feel that by abandoning the conception of "exchange as an equation" they have made a major contribution to economic theory. I hardly think so. They have clearly confused *conceptions* of profit as a category of income with *theories* of profits. To conceive profit as the product of surplus labour is not to determine how high profits are at any given moment in any given society, which will depend on how many workers are involved, what the rate of exploitation is, the extent to which surplus value is realised, how much is claimed in rent and interest and why, etc. All that is meant by the conception of profit as the product of surplus labour is that whatever profits are, they are conceived to represent so much surplus labour. But this is not a theory of profit.

The claim is made, at the end of the section on value, that Marx's theory makes a certain composition of demand necessary, without providing a proper theory of demand (Vol. I, p. 87). This is a strange claim, because it is the exact opposite of the truth. Like Ricardo, Marx assumes constant returns to scale so that both values and production prices are independent of the level and composition of demand. He does not discuss the determination of demand, because it is irrelevant to his theory of value and production prices. Far from being necessary, a particular composition of demand is completely unnecessary to Marx's theory of value.

Politics and Ideology as Class Struggle

The rejection of politics and ideology as class struggle (Vol. I, pp. 232-5) is developed through a critique of the notion of relative autonomy. The authors seek to show that either politics is not a reflection of class interests (and is therefore completely autonomous) or it is a direct reflection of class interests (so it has no autonomy). But the latter theory is a crude economism; so the notion of politics and ideology as class struggle cannot be sustained.

It seems to me that the authors are only able to reach this conclusion because they do not stop to think what the concept of relative autonomy might mean. Let us consider, first of all, two diametrically opposed positions: one a crude Marxist theory, which asserts that politics is a direct reflection of economics, so that all political history can be read off by knowing the class representation of the various political forces; and the other a non-Marxist theory of absolute autonomy, in which politics is asserted to bear no relationship to class interests. In the former theory, politics is interpreted as class struggle in a direct and simple sense, whereas in the latter it is not interpreted as class struggle at all.

The argument of Cutler *et al.* depends on these being the only two possible interpretations of politics. They perceive the notion of relative autonomy, correctly, to mean the recognition that political events and institutions have an impact on political history over and above the economic class determinations, but they then assume that this is combined with an interpretation of politics as class struggle which remains the same as in the crude Marxist theory. Not surprisingly, they then observe a contradiction.

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Relative Autonomy

But, clearly, the theory of relative autonomy cannot assert politics and ideology to be class struggle in the same crude way as economistic thought suggests. The theory abandons the notion that every detail of political practice can be meaningfully understood as determined by class interests. For instance, a wealth of different tactics may be consistent with a given political strategy, but it is obviously the strategy which we think of as class-determined. How many copies of a leaflet the Communist Party should print, or which advertising agency the Conservative Party should retain for its General Election campaign, may each be hotly debated within their respective leaderships, but no one would claim that the class representation of these parties hangs on the decision. Now the crude Marxist theory of politics demands precisely that these issues must be interpreted as the clash of different class positions, and it is to this that Cutler *et al.* refer. But it does not take much thought to recognise that the concept of relative autonomy means the abandonment of this notion. Politics may still be interpreted fundamentally as the clash of class interests without this being regarded as the explanation of every detail of political history. The essence of Conservative Party politics does not change because Mrs. Thatcher has a headache.

My criticism of Cutler *et al.* is that, instead of trying to think what the concept of relative autonomy might sensibly mean, they refuse to do so and eagerly seize on what appears to be an internal contradiction in the concept to demolish it. In reality, they are merely being inconsistent in their interpretation of it. Apart from anything else, this is somewhat naive, since if their argument were correct, it is scarcely conceivable that it could have gone unnoticed for so long.

Mode of Production

The authors' third main target is the concept of mode of production. They argue that, because *Capital* is a study of the capitalist mode of production in general, any theoretical work based on this concept is bound to ignore the particular characteristics of national capitalist economies, and to perceive them only as the movement of the capitalist mode of production in general (Vol. II, p. 235). In other words, the British economy in 1978 would be interpreted as an example of the capitalist mode of production in general, and any specific features which might influence its laws of motion would be ignored.

I find it difficult to follow the logic behind this argument. It seems to me to be equivalent to saying that, by defining the characteristics of apples which distinguish them from other fruits, one has specified what every apple that has ever existed is like. However, it is quite clearly the case that however idiosyncratic an apple might be, it still retains the characteristics of an apple. The concept of apple is clearly relevant to the study of particular apples, without being able to describe them completely. Only if one thinks that all apples are identical can one argue that the concept of apple in general defines all individual apples.

Thus, what the authors are effectively arguing is that Marx's concept of mode of production is such that all economies dominated by the capitalist mode of production are the same. They view the concept of mode of production as something rather like a bird's egg: just as an egg contains within it the complete embryo of a young bird and all the conditions necessary for its development until finally the day of hatching arrives, so Cutler *et al.* regard a mode of production as something whose whole history together with its ultimate breakdown is already prefigured in the concept itself. Therefore the differences between particular eggs of the same species, or particular examples of the capitalist mode of production, are minor and irrelevant.

Now, whilst the authors may themselves wish to use and demolish such a concept, the evidence that it conforms to Marx's is scanty. Moreover, there is no logical reason why the concept of mode of production should bear these special characteristics. One of the main arguments by which they justify this lies in Marx's description of the capitalist himself as "personified capital". To them this means that:

> "Ultimately, all capitalists and all workers are ever-always identical, bearers of the same "character masks". How they function as bearers depends upon the conditions imposed by movements in the totality itself" (Vol. II, p. 242).

In other words, the idea of human subjects as bearers of social relations allows no room for the variation of individuals, or for different economic agents to behave differently in the same situation. It is this which leads the authors to enter into a long discussion of "forms of enterprise calculation", all of which is designed to prove that the decisions of capitalists cannot be determined simply from a general concept of mode of production.

Laws of Motion

This is obviously true; the question is whether one needs to deny it. The argument really seems to turn on how one conceives the "laws of motion" of capitalism to function. It seems to me that Marx portrays them as pressures on individual capitals, inducing them to respond in certain ways

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because it is in their own interest to do so. Competition, for instance, pressurises capitalist enterprises to keep prices down in order to maintain sales. But this does not imply that every individual capitalist, or every enterprise, will react in precisely the same way to the same pressures. The originality of Marx's thought does not depend on such a hypothesis, which in its strong form is clearly ridiculous. Yet Cutler *et al.*'s concept of the capitalist mode of production depends on this assumption: without it, its history would not unwind like clockwork in the manner I have described.

The authors also argue that Marx's concept of mode of production includes the absolutely precise determination of demand and supply of labour within the concept itself. Now it is true that Marx describes the mechanism by which the reserve army of labour is recreated once it has been exhausted by a high rate of accumulation of capital. But to describe the mechanism is not to establish every detail of its working, nor to exclude the possibility of other factors influencing the supply of labour. It is surely a misreading of Marx to impose such a notion on him.

What is wrong with the authors' portrayal of the concept of mode of production is not that it is an impossible one—they are clearly free to choose their own definition—but that it is highly idiosyncratic. They ultimately claim, having demolished this particular concept, to have proved the redundancy of the concept of mode of production in general. This is clearly illegitimate. What they have demolished is the special attributes of their own concept. They have failed to prove that the concept of mode of production as such is an obstacle to theoretical progress, and I for one am convinced that it is not.

Interpretation of Marx

There is much in the book on which I have not touched; space permits discussion of the major issues alone. Nevertheless, a couple of general remarks are perhaps worth making. The first is that the language preferred by the authors, of which the two quotations above are fair samples, is not an asset. They would no doubt claim that it is necessary to rigorous inquiry and takes debate on to a higher level. But whenever I analysed a passage closely I did not feel that this was the case. The effect of the language is to force the reader to work very hard to decipher the underlying reasoning; but this reasoning is not in itself so complex (although unfortunately it is, on occasions, confused).

The second point is that the interpretation of Marx himself, while favourable to the authors' own argument, is debatable and would appear to deny him any sort of intellectual sophistication. If one does this to Marx it is of course not very difficult to knock him down: the procedure has been used repeatedly in right-wing polemics against Marxism, for instance. But where does this get us? I have shown that the authors set up a straw concept of mode of production and successfully flatten it. A lot of intellectual heat is generated but no light.

Marxism and Disciplines

As I mentioned at the beginning, this book is an essay in Marxist theory. In the end, however, I did not feel it added anything substantial to the subject and it certainly did not convince me of the correctness of its conclusions. It does raise the question of whether, in the present state of social science, to attempt to specialise in Marxist theory as such is of any value. My strong impression, based partly on this book, is that without really deep knowledge of such disciplines as philosophy, history and economics one is not going to settle major issues in Marxism which have been around for a long time now. Marxists specialising in these disciplines have the edge because they are forced to confront directly both the practical weaknesses of Marxist concepts and the progress of non-Marxist thought.

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Discussion:

Eurocommunism

Gerry Pocock

The discussion on Eurocommunism is important for all on the left, not just Communists, and while the term itself is inaccurate and often misleading and dangerous, it has become the peg for a lot of useful discussion.

It is a tribute to the resilience and stability of Communist Parties in Western Europe that all the attempts to destroy them as effective political forces in the cold war years failed, and that developments in Communist Parties (and not just those labelled "Eurocommunist") and the role they play, are the subject of intense interest. One of the unhelpful things about Eurocommunism as a term is that it conceals the fact that in reality there are developments in the *whole* of the West European labour movement which deserve our attention.

Alongside the ending of the cold war other developments are bringing about a "loosening up" or revaluation of Communist-Socialist relations. Among these other developments are the re-examination of Communist attitudes following the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the profound crisis of the capitalist world.

The Nature of Social Democracy

In his review of Carrillo's book in the July issue of *Marxism Today*, Sam Aaronovitch makes the point: ". . . what then of the judgments which Communists made of socialist and social democrat trends in the interwar years and even later? Did we not help to produce *their* errors and obscure the positive elements that existed amongst them?"

Manuel Azcarate, of the PCE, has stated: "It is not a question of returning to Social Democracy, whose historic role in certain periods has been to have administered capitalism, but never to have ended it. . . . It is clear that the Socialist Parties' abilities to assess this past critically and advance beyond it today opens up the concrete possibility of agreements on an allied march of Communists and Socialists in the construction of a democratic socialism. . . ."

What is important about this formulation is that it places social democracy in a historical context. It follows that in a different historical context the role of social democracy can be different, and our assessment of it has to be different.

I am not too confident of the Socialist Parties' capacity for self-criticism and they have something to learn from Communists in this respect. For example, the complacency of Palme, the Swedish Social Democrat, after his Party's defeat after 44 years in office was breathtaking.

Neither am I saying that social democracy is no longer administering capitalism: a look at the record and practices of just the Callaghan and Schmidt Governments is evidence of a continuing practice, though even in these instances the process is contradictory and we could do with some fuller analysis of these Governments. But we argue, and rightly so, that a victory for Thatcher would be a serious setback, and that there have been valuable gains made under the Labour Government.

Beyond Traditional Social Democracy

Referring to a tour he made in Scandinavia, Chiaromonte of the PCI stated: "The interest manifested towards what is known as Eurocommunism derives from our effort not to follow the road built by the socialist societies of Eastern Europe (while fully recognising the enormous value of the rupture made and the enormous number of people throughout the world emancipated as a result) and at the same time, from our ambition to go beyond the social democratic experiences, even the most advanced and those which most merit our examination and consideration (as is the case with the Scandinavians)."

Or we can take the words of Eric Heffer: "On the one hand, the old social democratic policies have revealed their limitations and it is obvious that socialist parties must go beyond merely administering the capitalist system, and begin to fundamentally change it. On the other, the Eurocommunist Parties have now accepted that democracy is absolutely essential in the creation of a socialist society."

All of which is a much more satisfactory way of approaching social democracy than the rather static formula of describing it simply as the theory and practice of class collaboration.

Reluctant though they may be to admit it, Socialists will have to come to realise that there is no prospect of the transition to a socialist society without Communists. Both Communists and Socialists have to do much more study of each other's experiences in the years since the split and

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find ways of working together. I believe that because of the changes enumerated above there is now greater prospect for this. All Socialists do criticise capitalism and the workings of the capitalist system; they are continually coming up with proposals for overcoming or controlling this or that aspect of capitalism, be it the operations of multinational companies or unemployment. They are firmly committed to the process of detente. In the profound crisis of the capitalist system the gap between the aspirations of Socialists and what is achievable has grown. Most Communist Parties now envisage a strategy which is based on a transition to socialism as a process rather than a single act. The prospects for developing demands and campaigns—and strategies—that bring Socialists and Communists into one movement (not one party) are increased.

Socialist International

The Socialist International has spent a lot of time on the subject of relations with Communists, particularly those parties known as Eurocommunist (Spain, Italy, France), but not only those. At the famous SI meeting in Elsinore (Denmark) in 1976, it proved impossible for one common line to be agreed, and it was left to each party to take its own decisions on alliances. There were two main views: one, that under no circumstances could or should there be any sort of alliance; the second, that these alliances were necessary. The main opposition, of course, came from Schmidt of the West German SPD, who was reported as saying that countries that allowed Communists to share in government could not be regarded as reliable NATO allies or even as members of the EEC! Mitterand is credited with the view that Socialists and Communists in Southern Europe both represented the working class and close co-operation was essential.

Subsequently there was a rumour of a possible setting up of a Southern Socialist group (France, Spain, Portugal, Italy) and a proposal for a joint meeting of these four Socialist Parties with their counterpart Communist Parties. In June 1977, the bureau of the International again avoided a firm position, and the subject of Eurocommunism has continued to be debated and long articles on the subject have appeared in the SI journal.

Coincident with this interest in relations with Communist Parties has been a big increase in the activities of the Socialist International, a doubling of its budget under its new President, Willi Brandt, and attempts to expand the influence of the International in new areas, particularly the third world. Its next congress (Canada, later this year) will also update the Declaration on the Aims and Tasks of Democratic Socialism, adopted when the International was founded in 1951, and a cold war document if ever there was one.

Expansion of Social Democracy

This expansion of Social Democracy is a bit unexpected. Alternatively, we have to recognise that it too is very resilient and that the notion that its theory and support would enter into decay and decline with the end of Empire and the crisis of capitalism is wrong. Harold Wilson's observation that Labour is becoming the "natural party of government" is an acute one and has an application to Socialist Parties elsewhere. Nor can this process be ascribed simply to managing the system, though that danger exists. Theories and practices of social democracy will persist and will present a very definite and attractive view of society.

In this situation it is important that Communists strive to influence the whole of social democracy, not just its left wing. This means a strenuous campaign by the Communists and the left to counteract both the efforts of the non-Socialist right to capture or control the Socialist movement e.g., of the Liberals and the Labour Party, the FDP and the West German Social Democrats. Also we have to counter the very powerful efforts by the most right-wing and anti-Marxist Socialist Party in Western Europe (the West Germans) to control the ideology of the Socialist movement and freeze out any idea of co-operation between Socialists and Communists.

The SPD

The SPD has carried through the most thoroughgoing rejection of Marxism in its 1959 programme and today occupies the most influential positions in the West European labour movement—Presidency of the Socialist International, Presidency of the European TUC, General Secretaryship of the ICFTU, the leading force in the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the EEC, and so on.

There are many examples of the way that influence has been used to whip other Socialist Parties into line by both stick and carrot; the pressure on the French Socialist Party, the help given to the Spanish and Portuguese Parties. It has inspired the choice of rivalry to Communist Parties rather than alliance that is increasingly evident in the Socialist Parties of France, Spain and Italy. The same has been true on the trade union front also: the blackballing of the French Communist/Socialist CGT from membership of the ETUC, and now the same rejection of the Spanish Workers' Commissions plus strenuous efforts to boost the UGT which is linked with the Socialist Party. It has been apparent, too, in the EEC, of which the SPD has been the keenest advocate. The Confederation of Socialist Parties

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of the EEC drew up a programme for the European Assembly elections which was a direct reflection of the SPD approach, strongly federalist and supporting the market economy.

What is also true, however, is the resistance within the Socialist Parties and trade unions. The West Germans were obliged to agree to admit the Italian CGIL into the ETUC. They have not been able to completely stifle unity trends in Spain and France. One of the most spectacular setbacks was the shelving of the EEC programme, which has now been watered down to a fairly harmless declaration. On both the trade union and party front, the British Labour Party and TUC have put forward a much more positive line than the SPD. Most notably, the Labour Party refused to have anything to do with the EEC programme discussions and thus helped force the abandonment of it.

The point is that the Communists need to have a twofold approach: one in assessing and understanding the Socialist International as a section of the labour movement and the need to study all aspects of it: second, to see the different trends within it and the importance of being part of the struggles between them.

This contribution to the discussion opened up by Sam Aaronovitch can only indicate problems and above all stress the importance of dialogue between Communists and Socialists, as well as the need for united campaigning. Both these will need to be fought for and will probably require of us to consider in a much more serious way the Socialist half of our movement in its entirety, even the bits we don't like.

Further Questions

I would like to finish by referring to two questions: Firstly, just as the Communist Parties have had to make painful assessments of the Soviet Union and the other Socialist countries of Eastern Europe, to admit to mistakes and to define new strategies, the same problem faces Socialists. They cannot pretend that it was all a mistake, or that there is nothing positive to learn from the Soviet experience. Of the parties of the Second International, the Labour Party has historically been able to make a much more balanced judgment of relations with the CPSU than most of its sister parties. This perhaps could be a question for joint discussion. Secondly, there is the question of the role of the Communist Party, which is tied in with the Socialist Parties' electoralism. In the discussion on Eurocommunism, while the importance of "big" Communist Parties is accepted, others are dismissed as irrelevant because they have no electoral muscle. The Swedish CP was saved because its small group of MPs were an essential part of the Social Democrat parliamentary majority. Allied to this practice of judging parties purely in electoral terms is the repeated suggestion that the Communist Parties must throw out democratic centralism if they are to become acceptable. Apart from anything else, this attitude is one that also stems from electoralism, and whilst Communists need to learn from the experiences of Socialist Parties on the importance of demands that can win a majority, surely the overwhelming lesson of Socialist governments is that reliance on electoralism and consensus politics is disastrous. There would appear to be here another area of fruitful discussion.

Finally, I must agree with Sam that it is important to appreciate the *differences* in the situation in the countries of Western Europe. This is particularly true with the Socialist Parties—the history and position of each one is specific. What is common is the need to develop unity between Communists and Socialists.

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